

NATIONAL ATHLETIC TRAINERS' ASSOCIATION (NATA) OFFERS TIPS TO IMPROVE CHEERLEADING SAFETY & REDUCE INJURIES

DALLAS, March 28, 2006 – It's not an Olympic sport yet. However, with its tumbling, flips and other high-flying stunts, cheerleading has evolved into a highly athletic, organized and competitive activity for participants of both sexes, ages five and above.

Between 1990 and 2002, participation in the sport increased 18 percent and injuries more than doubled, according to a study in *Pediatrics*, official journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics. An estimated 208,000 young people, ages five to 18, were treated in hospitals during that time for related injuries. A recent high-profile accident involved a Southern Illinois University cheerleader who tumbled from a 15-foot human pyramid onto her head, resulting in a concussion and cracked vertebra in her neck.

“Needless to say, it is important to raise awareness of the physical demands of the sport,” said Hollie A. Huggins, MS, ATC, PES, head athletic trainer at the Hockaday School in Dallas, Texas, and former Dallas Cowboys cheerleader. Karen M. Lew, MEd, ATC, Southeastern Louisiana University in Hammond, La., agrees. **“Safety precautions must be in place to decrease the frequency and severity of cheerleading injuries.** As an athletic trainer for the National High School and College Cheerleading Championships, I know how critical it is for competitors to take these precautions seriously.”

Both Huggins and Lew are among the 30,000 members of the National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA), who specialize in the prevention, assessment, treatment and rehabilitation of injuries and illnesses. **NATA commends the American Association of Cheerleading Coaches and Administrators (AACCA) for creating its Cheerleading Safety Manual and encourages all cheerleading coaches to familiarize themselves with it to make this sport safer for all participants.** The manual's third edition is expected to be released in the coming months.

Throughout March, NATA is celebrating National Athletic Training Month with the theme, “Be Active – Stay Healthy.” Keeping with the spirit of the month, Huggins and Lew have compiled a list of tips which they believe will help reduce cheerleader injuries at all levels:

Source: National Athletic Trainers Association, 2952 Stemmons Freeway, Ste. 200, Dallas, TX 75247, 214.637.6282; 214.637.2206 (fax). www.nata.org.

TIPS TO REDUCE CHEERLEADER INJURIES

1. **Proper Conditioning:** Physically prepare and maintain your body's strength, flexibility, and stamina for stunting and tumbling. **Strengthen your core muscles** (abdominal and lower back muscles) along with the upper and lower body and **include aerobic** (running, jogging, cycling, swimming) and anaerobic (wind sprints, circuit training) **activities**.
2. **Exercise Reminders:** **Warm up, stretch and cool down** for every practice or competition and be sure to rest.
3. **Proper Equipment:** **Practice on mats or padded flooring** until your routines are perfected. Make sure the mats are adequately sized and sufficient for the activities you're performing.
4. **Spotting:** **Have trained spotters** present and engaged at all times.
5. **Knowledgeable Coaches:** Make sure your coaches are certified in safety, first aid, CPR and AED use.
6. **No Horseplay:** **Focus at all times** during stunting and tumbling activities.
7. **Communication:** Request that your coaches **review safety precautions, rules and regulations with the squad on a regular basis**, and that they establish and implement an **emergency action plan**.
8. **Read Safety Guidelines:** Ask your coaches to be familiar with the latest **AACCA safety guidelines**; the safety advice in the **National Federation of State High School Associations' "Spirit Rules Book"**; and the rules and regulations pertaining to your particular school.
9. **Know Your Limits:** **Be aware of your (cheerleaders) ability level** and do not attempt advanced level gymnastic or stunting skills before mastering less advanced skills. Always have a supervisor present.
10. **Treatment of Injuries:** **Promptly attend to any injuries** you sustain. Your school or organization's athletic trainer can assist in the proper treatment and prevention of such injuries. He or she can also offer an injury prevention education seminar and assist in creating the conditioning routine.

About the NATA:

Certified athletic trainers are unique health care providers who specialize in the prevention, assessment, treatment and rehabilitation of injuries and illnesses. The National Athletic Trainers' Association represents and supports the 30,000 members of the athletic training profession through education and research. www.nata.org. NATA, 2952 Stemmons Freeway, Ste. 200, Dallas, TX 75247, 214.637.6282; 214.637.2206 (fax).