

Cole's Story:



Coach Saves a Wrestler's Life by Knowing Concussion Signs and Symptoms

One of the biggest problems in keeping pre-teen or teenage athletes off of the field—or in this case the mat—after they've been injured is that they're at an age where they often feel "invincible."

That was the case with Cole, a high school wrestler. Cole sustained a concussion, which is a type of traumatic brain injury—or TBI—caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or hit to the body. This sudden movement of the brain can cause the brain to bounce around or twist in the skull, stretching and damaging the brain cells and creating chemical changes in the brain. These chemical changes can lead to short- or long-term problems with thinking, learning, language, and emotions, until the brain recovers.

"I went to the emergency room and was told not to return to wrestling for at least a month. I ignored the doctor and returned to wrestling after one week," said Cole. "During practice, one of the coaches noticed a problem, and pulled me out. My neurologist believes this action by my coach saved my life."

In November 2010, Cole had completed a wrestling drill when a teammate next to him rolled over and landed on top of his head. He doesn't remember the details himself, but his teammate reports that Cole was slow to get up from the mat, complained that his head hurt, and didn't understand what was happening.

When Cole's mother picked him up from practice, she noticed something was wrong and immediately took him to the emergency department. The doctor diagnosed Cole with a concussion and instructed him to rest and to not return to wrestling for about a month.

Despite this advice, Cole snuck out to practice after a week. He did not tell his family that he was going there, or the coach that he wasn't supposed to be there. Fortunately, his coach knew all about concussion.

"My high school encourages coaches to take CDC's online concussion training and has concussion-awareness posters in many locker rooms," said Cole. "I am so grateful for these posters and trainings!"

CDC's free online training for coaches helped his coach recognize that Cole was acting clumsy and appeared stunned. Cole was answering questions slowly and seemed to be having trouble with his memory. Cole's coach had learned that these were signs of concussion.



Although most athletes with a concussion recover quickly and fully, some—like Cole—may have longer-term challenges that are both cognitive (thinking and learning activities) and physical, especially if they return to play too soon.

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"This was certainly one of the worse decisions I have made. It's been several months and I'm still recovering. But I will probably never be able to wrestle again just because I wanted to get back to practice," said Cole.

Rest—and that includes taking a break from school work, as well as physical activities—is critical to helping the brain heal after a concussion. That's why it takes a team approach: Coaches, school and health care professionals, parents, and students—and the athlete, too—must all work together to support the athlete and make sure s/he gets the needed rest.

It isn't easy to keep a talented and ambitious athlete like Cole on the sidelines, especially when he wants to get back into play. And sometimes people believe that it shows strength and courage to play when you're injured. Not only is that belief wrong, it can put a young athlete at risk for serious injury.

Coaches and parents should be prepared for young athletes to resist sitting out of play or practice, as he or she might feel frustrated, sad, or even angry about having to sit out. Coaches and parents should:

- Talk to them about it.
- Be honest about the risks of getting put back in play too soon.
- Offer support and encouragement.
- Tell them that taking a time out is not a sign of weakness, and that playing with a concussion is dangerous. With rest, they'll start to feel better.

Cole's coach experienced firsthand the importance of knowing how to recognize a concussion and keeping an athlete on the sidelines if there is any question that s/he could have a concussion. Cole wants other young athletes to know: "If you have a concussion, your brain needs time to heal. Don't hide. Report it. Take time to recover. It's better to miss one game than the whole season."

To learn more and to get free resources for coaches, visit www.cdc.gov/Concussion and look for the Heads Up materials for high school and youth sports coaches. Make sure to check out the free, online training for coaches. In less than 30 minutes, coaches can get ready for the sports season by completing the training and earning a certificate of completion. Parents can also download free resources about the importance of recognizing a concussion, taking time to recover, and helping kids and teens with a concussion.