

Lending Many Hands

Through innovative programs, Kevin Wolf is bringing quality healthcare to his community.

By Shelly Wilson

Shelly Wilson is an Assistant Editor at Training & Conditioning.

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In this world, there are those who talk about getting things done and there are those who just do them.

Kevin Wolf, MS, ATC, is one of those athletic trainers who not only completes his day-to-day duties with great resolve and proficiency, but also finds the energy—and more importantly, maintains the interest—to bring new opportunities to the athletes, coaches, and students in his community. In his roles as both Athletic Outreach Coordinator for Tennessee Sports Medicine and Orthopedics at University Medical Center, in Lebanon, Tenn., and Head Athletic Trainer at Lebanon High School over the past six years, Wolf has worked with his colleagues to improve the health and care of student-athletes, the education of students and coaches, and the profile of the athletic training profession in the community with great success.

"Kevin is a very goal-oriented kind of person, and he is very aggressive about [bettering his profession]," says Danna Armour, MA, ATC, Head Athletic Trainer at Cumberland College, who collaborated with Wolf on an upcoming summer program. "He's always looking to do new things and he's the kind of person who makes athletic training look good."

In 1994, Wolf took a position as an athletic trainer with The Rehab Group, a small new rehabilitation and physical therapy clinic in Lebanon started by orthopedic surgeon Dr. Charles Kaelin, Jr. "At the time, I was a clinic athletic trainer in a Murfreesboro orthopedic office," says Wolf, "and I wanted to become more of a field trainer." By accepting the position with The Rehab Group, Wolf got that chance.

Wolf's primary responsibility in the position was to develop a program to bring regular athletic trainer coverage to the local high schools. Wolf built a sports medicine outreach program from the ground up—procuring staff, developing relationships, and enlisting schools. "He was the first athletic trainer we ever had," says Randall Hutto, Head Boys' Basketball Coach at Lebanon High School, "and we were the first program started in our county."

"I started with Lebanon High School, and just by the program doing what it needed to do, we were able to expand to some other schools in the area," Wolf says. "The University Medical Center saw that it was a good program, had the resources to expand it, and so they took it over. Now, we have 12 full-time athletic trainers and we serve 14 high schools in some respect or another."

Since initiating the outreach program, Lebanon High School has enjoyed the continued benefit of Wolf's dedication and desire to improve. "I can't tell you what a plus it has been for the athletic program having Kevin at Lebanon," says Melvin Daniels, Assistant Principal and Athletic Director at Lebanon. "It's been a Godsend. Knowing Kevin is going to be at games or practices sets the parents' minds at ease and coaches really respect his medical opinion. The students respect him, they listen to him, and they know that they're going to be well taken care of if an injury comes about. Because he doesn't just tell them, 'You've twisted your ankle.' He'll explain it to them, rehab them, and follow up with them."

"He's very knowledgeable," adds Barbara Hallums, Lebanon High School's Head Girls' Basketball Coach. "And when he talks to the athletes, he's very down to earth with them and talks to them in their terms. And he's always straightforward with them. He'll tell them, 'If you're not going to do this, then I can't help you. If you're going to do what I tell you to do, then we can make progress.'" Another policy that has won co-workers over is Wolf's availability. "He's on call 24/7," says Hutto. "Any time on the weekends or at night that we need him, we page him, and it's not a problem."

While some might regard this accessibility as over-dedication, Wolf explains it simply. "One of my jobs is to be an advocate for the athlete," he says. "Parents and coaches have to make judgment calls on how they are going to take care of the athletes. If someone turns their ankle, they don't know if he or she has a sprain or a fracture and chances are the athlete is going to go to the emergency room or family physician. But if they page me and I can get over there to look at the injury, then maybe I can save those parents a few dollars and a visit to the ER."

"Even if you want to look at it from the selfish, don't-bother-me-when-I'm-off-duty angle," he adds, "my job is going to be easier once I come back to work if I take care of those injuries when it's timely. That doesn't mean that I have to drive to the school, home, or away game. But if I can answer a few questions and set their minds at ease, they can be treated, stabilized, and then I can see them the next day in the office."

Wolf has also won allies by bringing a student athletic trainer program to Lebanon High School. "That has definitely been beneficial for the athletes," Hutto says, "but I think the biggest benefit has been for the student athletic trainers themselves."

Unlike some other programs, Wolf personally selects his student athletic trainers. "It took me a while to get comfortable with the idea of starting that program, because establishing a student athletic trainer program can be like opening a can of worms," Wolf explains. "Without student athletic trainers you can treat injuries and tend to your duties the way you want to, but you have to work a little harder. But when you have student trainers, you have to train them and you're accountable to them, their parents, and the whole program to make sure that they do a good job. You have to be a role model for them and, at times, you have to discipline them. That's why I was wary about beginning it. So, my student athletic trainers are hand-picked. They might come and ask me to join, but they have to prove to me that they're really interested, because once they start, I want very few to quit. That's why I'm so selective."

Wolf's student athletic trainers don't follow a set curriculum. Instead, they learn from watching him. Wolf has them practice the necessary skills until they've mastered them, and then allows them to work more directly with the student-athletes. "I also encourage them to seek CPR and first-aid certification, and they participate in a strength and conditioning course with the athletes."

Wolf also encourages his student athletic trainers to attend specialized summer camps geared specifically to them. This summer, thanks



to a brainstorm between him and Cumberland College's Armour, Wolf's student athletic trainers are going to have the opportunity to attend a brand new camp right in their own backyard.

"I had gone to some camps when I was younger," says Armour, "and Kevin was familiar with camps at Middle Tennessee State University, University of Tennessee-Knoxville, and Vanderbilt. I wanted to start something like that here at Cumberland, and when I mentioned it to him, he was all gung-ho about it."

Working together, the Outreach and Cumberland staffs have developed a four-day camp with a commuter/stay-over option. Students who participate in the camp will receive certification in CPR and first aid, education in the prevention of injuries and rules regarding over-the-counter medication, and instruction in taping, bandaging, and splinting techniques. In addition, guest speakers will address the various settings of athletic training and the healthcare trades. And for those students who have been student athletic trainers for a few years, there will still be new things to learn.

"We're going to be able to introduce them to the setting they might be working in in college," says Armour. "There's a lot of equipment and modalities here that they aren't familiar with, like ultrasound machines and stim machines. And with my student athletic trainers here, they will be able to offer the high school students a sense of what it's like in this environment, and maybe pique their interest."

While Wolf gets satisfaction from providing such opportunities for his student athletic trainers, he has also developed programs to better equip the coaches in his community—like converting a CPR certification course into a day-and-a-half coaches' clinic.

"The whole thing evolved out of my desire to have these coaches trained in emergency techniques," says Wolf. "Early on, I used to offer a CPR course at the high school, and then I decided to add something to make it more interesting and get coaches there. I figured we could set up a workshop through the hospital and cover other topics too, like taping labs and lectures on topics pertinent to their jobs, and then cover fun topics as well, like strength and conditioning, nutrition, various injuries, and maybe have a successful coach do a keynote lecture. It's held every summer and this is its fourth year, serving the 14 schools we work with plus some others."

While Wolf no longer coordinates the annual coaches' clinic, it's understandable—because it coincides with UMC's annual free physicals day, a screening day that provides head-to-toe examinations for over 1,000 student-athletes in a single day. Wolf has helped develop and coordinate this event since he began at The Rehab Group.

"You really can't do a good job with sports medicine without providing physicals for your athletes—it's a baseline to go by," says Wolf. "It's gotten to be such a big event that we had to move it to the hospital campus. We have 100 hospital workers there, over 20 doctors at a time. Last year, we did 1,300 physicals and this year we expect to do 1,500. And we try to make it a fun atmosphere. We bring in celebrity NFL and baseball Hall of Famers to talk to the kids."

Of those who have shaped his professional philosophies, Wolf cites his father-in-law, Boots Donnelly, as one of his role models. "I was a student athletic trainer when he was the head football coach at MTSU. He has a genuine interest in helping people and he's always helping his former players. When I think about how hard I need to work, I think about him. If there's somebody that I want to be like when it comes to helping people, he's the person."

His colleagues would say that he has reached that goal. "Kevin doesn't just go in and punch a clock from eight until three and then go home and forget about things," says Hutto. "Athletic training is a life for him, not just a job—which makes our world just so tremendously better than it was before we had Kevin. There are so many things that he has changed that are to the betterment of other people—our athletes, coaches, and students."