

Cumberland staff members save a life, and showcase NJSIAA safety requirements



It was a typical June day at Cumberland Regional High School, when in an instant, something very unexpectedly happened.

A weight room session was taking place for new freshmen, basically to just to show them the workouts that would be held over the summer to prepare for football season.

Several staff members were there, including athletic director Todd Jorgenson and head football coach Jason Coombs. In the midst of those basic exercises, an older player present suddenly collapsed.

“The young man had just warmed up with some stretching and came into the weight room,” Jorgenson said. “Shortly after, he collapsed. Coach Coombs tried speaking to him and checked for a pulse. He could not find a pulse. Coach dialed 911 while I started compressions. My administrative assistant, Terri Battiata, went to get one of our AEDs (Automatic External Defibrillators). When Mrs. Battiata arrived with the AED, I switched off the compressions with my daughter, Jenna, who is a volunteer coach for girls soccer, and had just graduated with her BS in nursing in May.

“As I was beginning to get our AED out, an EMT who was across the street heard the call and came into the weight room. He had his AED with him, got his AED out and set up. I went back to compressions. When the ambulance arrived, we all helped get the young man on the stretcher and the EMT’s took him into the ambulance.”

The group effort saved the life of the boy, who this month is back at school.

While the whole sequence was intense, it was also without panic. Part of the reason for that, aside from the professionalism of the people involved, is the



Cumberland football coach Jason Coombs (left) and Athletic Director Todd Jorgenson (right) with an award given by the Tri-County Conference in recognition of the save

training that they’ve undergone to prepare for such situations.

It’s not something that everyone may be aware of, but all high school coaches in New Jersey must be certified in four different areas - first aid, CPR/ AED heat acclimation and concussion awareness. That’s in addition to the presence of certified athletic trainers whenever possible.

As part of that, all coaches must hold a current certificate in CPR, AED and basic first aid.

Additionally, online CPR/AED training courses do not satisfy that requirement.

Every coach must also have concussion awareness training through an online course or an in-service program, which is renewed annually. Likewise, all coaches must obtain a heat acclimatization and wellness certificate, which is also renewed annually.

Another important tool in helping athletes, and others on hand for events in New Jersey, is the state defibrillator law, also known as “Janet’s Law.” It requires all K-12 schools in the state, public and private, to establish and implement an Emergency Action Plan to address sudden cardiac arrest.

Janet’s Law requires every district/school to have an AED available in an unlocked location on school property with an appropriate identifying sign. The AED must be accessible during the school day, and any other time when a school-sponsored athletic event or team practice is taking place in which pupils of the district/school are participating. The AED must also be within reasonable proximity of the school athletic field or gymnasium, as applicable.

All of those procedures helped save the life of the young athlete at Cumberland. Similar saves have taken place around the state in recent years.

“I think this is an example of why coaches are required to have certification in CPR/AED,” Jorgenson said. “As Coach Coombs said, he had just updated his certification a few weeks before the incident. I keep my certification current as well, since I am also around the athletes quite a bit. To not have the requirement of CPR/AED training, the potential would be there to make it more difficult in this type of situation.

“As a parent myself, who has coached and been in education for over 30 years, it is a comfort to know that coaches who are with our kids are trained and educated in these areas,” he said. “I think parents should know that our coaches are trained and stay updated in these areas, as that can give them an added sense of security in case there is an emergency situation.”

All in all, it was a situation that showed how a serious emergency can take place anytime, anywhere. But as tense as the scene at Cumberland might have been, the staff was prepared - and it was reflected in the outcome.

“I know there were others involved that day, but with the focus on administering CPR, I don’t know who was doing what,” Jorgenson said. “I am certain there were a lot of prayers being said. The school also had counseling set up for everyone involved for the next few days.

“You never know how you are going to handle a situation like this until you are presented with it,” he said. “Looking back, everyone handled it with little, if any, panic. The training that we take part in is a big reason that things happened as well as they did. Everyone did their job, what they are trained to do.”

And now, three months later, Jorgenson gets to see the athlete around school.

“I see the young man often at football practice and games and in the hallways between classes,” he said. “I am just happy to see him. I don’t really think about the day that event happened each time. However, it is still emotional when I do think about that day. Humbling is probably the word I would use to describe the feeling. I thank God that we were able to help him and pray that he continues to improve.”