

Egg Harbor Township Athletic Trainers help save a life



As the athletic trainers at Egg Harbor Township High School, Kyu Lee and Jennifer Zepp knew the weekend of Feb. 24-25 was going to be a busy one.

That's because their school would be hosting the NJSIAA Region 8 Wrestling Championships, which meant the gym would be full of competitors from schools throughout South Jersey, all angling to advance to the individual state finals in Atlantic City. Action would be continuous and emotions would be high.

But what people often forget is that the intensity and passion also extends to the stands, especially when fans are locked in on a son or grandson competing on the mat.

"We've held big state events at EHT for a while, so I guess I'm used to big events," said Lee, who has worked at the school since 2006. "I was at St. Joseph's in Hammonton for three years prior to that. I went to Rutgers University in New Brunswick and did athletic training internships with the Rutgers football team, ice hockey team, Atlantic City High School, Absegami High School and the Atlantic City Surf baseball team. I've been working region and district wrestling tournaments since 2000."

Likewise, Zepp is experienced working events like Region 8. She started at Egg Harbor Township in 2021. Prior to that, she worked at Rothman Orthopaedics and was contracted to Absegami, where she worked for six years. The Millersville (Pa.) University graduate has worked many wrestling events, including helping Lee at the Regions since 2016.

"During Regions, there are a lot of spectators and it's loud," Lee noted. "We have three mats going, and have an ATC stationed at each mat."

The action began at 4:30 on Friday afternoon, and around 40 minutes later, there was a sudden commotion near Mat 2.



*Egg Harbor Township Athletic Trainers
Jennifer Zepp and Kyu Lee*

That commotion wound up being something that Lee and Zepp will never forget. That's because they helped save a life.

A grandparent of a Washington Township wrestler had collapsed in the stands. The two athletic trainers, with the help of several others on the scene, executed an emergency action plan to precision.

"Having to be recertified in CPR/AED every two years helps," Lee said. "And as a former instructor for CPR, you are aware of all the up-to-date protocols. Ms. Zepp also is an instructor for CPR/AED and she certifies all the coaches in the district. We also go over the emergency action plans frequently to make sure everything is up to date, site specific, and adjust accordingly to implement the plan which best suits the situation that may come up."

"As Kyu mentioned, I'm a CPR instructor and could recite the steps for CPR in my sleep," Zepp said. "I think that constant practice helps to make it muscle memory for when situations like this arise. We just prepare for the worst and hope it does not happen."

Having and going over an emergency action plan yearly or seasonally makes it just become second nature.”

Lee and Zepp were initially called over by a coach for a person being down. Once they ran over, they saw an older man lying face down on the floor, with his legs up on the bleachers.

“I went down to the ground to talk to him,” Lee said. “He really wasn’t responding to me but breathing. Ms. Zepp asked the family about any medical conditions. I had to rule out a spinal injury, so with help of a couple people around me, we rolled him over while stabilizing his neck on to his back.”

Once that was done, they saw that his face was turning blue, he was unresponsive and stopped breathing. By that time, Zepp had hurried to the training room to get the AED and call for EMS.

With the help of a spectator, Tony Leone (a retired Washington Township police officer) and Egg Harbor school security, an area was cleared and CPR began on the patient.

Within a couple of cycles of CPR, Zepp brought over the AED and attached the pads. Once they were attached, the instructions from the device advised shock. Once the shock was administered, the patient took a big breath and started breathing on his own with a good pulse. Oxygen was administered until EMS arrived.

According to Egg Harbor Township athletic director Kevin Rutledge, the initial 911 call was made at 5:15. The Egg Harbor Township EMS were on scene by 5:21.

For all of their preparation and training, the incident was the first time that Lee and Zepp were placed in that particular situation. But they handled it all in outstanding fashion.

“Many times I’ve dealt with with spectators who may be diabetic or fainting, or maybe not feeling well, but I’ve never had to administer CPR or use an AED,” Zepp said.

“I had never had to perform CPR or use an AED,” Lee

said. “But I have experience with spectators losing consciousness, fainting due to heat, low blood sugar and with medical emergencies on the field.”

There was one other thing to consider on Friday night at Egg Harbor. The emergency took place very early in the night, and a couple of hours still remained in the session, plus a full day on Saturday. That meant the athletic trainers, coaches and other workers had to go right back to work.

“Once he was taken away on EMS, we were back to wrestling,” Lee said. “Obviously you are still thinking about him, and hoping that he was going to be okay. But wrestling can be busy, so we kind of zone out and go back to work. Later in the evening, Mr. Leone, who was the spectator that knew the family and was a big help during the emergency, told me that the man was at the hospital, was alert, talking and in stable condition. We got a couple more updates from Washington Township spectators that knew him throughout the night.”

“Once we made sure we had the spectator’s information and he was on his way to the hospital, there was little time before the mats started up again,” Zepp said. “It was kind of crazy to go from one thing to then get back to work covering the mats.”

But they were ready, and thankfully had no other major issues that night.

On Saturday morning, a special moment occurred when the gentleman’s daughter and son-in-law came to visit the gym to give an update on his condition and to offer thanks.

The major takeaway from the situation was the importance of having a well-trained staff and a well-thought Emergency Action Plan.

“Having an EAP in place and having good people around to execute the plan is key,” Lee said. “From the helpful spectators, to security, to our administration for clearing the lane and intake of EMS through our side entrance, everyone did a great job. We also watched the video of the incident, self-scouting, and we will talk about what we could have done better, what we could change, if any, and always try to improve. Even though me and Ms.

Zepp have been doing this for a long time, it's very important to be self-evaluated and learn so that we can always do things better and learn from past experiences and situations to help us become better athletic trainers."

They also had the full appreciation of the Washington Township community.

Kevin Murphy, the Washington Township athletic director, additionally appreciated the work of Leone and his own coaching staff for their quick reactions to the emergency.

"Our community is extremely grateful for the quick emergency medical response," Murphy said. "As athletic administrators, we always talk about team building. This was the ultimate team, a life-saving team."

March is National Athletic Training Month. The NJSIAA salutes all of the athletic trainers who help keep our state's student-athletes, support personnel and fans safe