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# Voyageur Athletics Student-Athlete Return-to-Play (RTP) Policy

## **Introduction**

Athletic injuries have become much more a part of sport across Canada. Despite efforts to improve medical care provided to athletes injuries remain unpredictable and an unfortunate part of competition.

In 1987, Flint proposed a "Bill of Rights for Injured Athletes". According to Flint, athletes should receive (a) appropriate, immediate medical attention, (b) moral, informed decisions concerning the athlete's return to play (RTP) after an injury, and (c) rules to protect athletes from injury and re-injury.

There remains some confusion about who makes the decision to return injured or ill student-athletes to competition. A number of factors could influence such a decision and exactly who has the education, experience, and authority to make the final decision.

In 1992, Flint & Weiss surveyed 60 CIAU basketball coaches and 49 CIAU certified athletic therapists to determine who should make RTP decisions. Results from the coaches (70%) and the athletic therapists (90%) clearly indicate that RTP decisions must be the responsibility of the athletic therapist. Coaches, with limited medical background or training, should never make or be put in a position to make RTP decisions. Their focus and role during competition hampers objective decision making when athletes are injured and could result in serious ethical and legal ramifications.

## **Purpose of Policy**

This Policy will describe clear guidelines for the RTP of Voyageur student-athletes following injury or illness. There will be different levels of approval required depending on the type and severity of the injury or illness. In all cases the well-being of the student-athlete must take precedence, not the game situation or the need to win or succeed.

## **Diagnosis**

The Voyageur Athletic Therapy Clinic (VATC) is staffed by certified athletic therapists. There is also a University Health Services (UHS) department, which provides full medical treatment. All Voyageur Athletic teams, in accordance with the VATC's

policies and procedures, have an assigned student trainer who is supervised directly by a VATC athletic therapist.

The VATC does initial injury assessments and refers the student-athlete to a physician for further medical assessment. A treatment protocol is instituted immediately. The student-athlete may also be referred to medical professionals outside UHS, if required. Team student trainers have the mandate and authority to provide emergency injury assessment and prescribe immediate treatment to Voyager student-athletes. The student trainer will notify their VATC supervisor (and the VATC) of all student-athlete injuries/illnesses.

Through these arrangements, student-athletes and coaches have access to qualified and competent expertise.

### **Rehabilitation**

The rehabilitation schedule will be discussed and agreed upon by the student-athlete, athletic therapist and, when necessary, the treating physician. With the student-athlete's permission, the coach will be kept informed of the student-athlete's rehabilitation progress, and will be consulted regarding any modifications that need to be made to allow the athlete's progressive RTP. The student trainer will also be kept informed and may be asked to participate in the rehabilitation program.

### **Return to Play (RTP)**

The time and amount of rehabilitation required before a student-athlete returns to play (practice or competition) will vary depending on the severity and type of injury/illness. Where present all approved RTP guidelines will be strictly followed.

RTP procedures will be discussed and agreed upon by the student-athlete, VATC therapist and, when necessary, the treating physician. With the athlete's permission, the coach and student trainer will be kept informed and included in any decision making as required.

When an athlete suffers an injury that is either life threatening or could cause long-term damage or disability, he/she will be allowed to return to play only once written approval from a treating physician is received by the athletic therapist. Further evaluation by medical personnel (second opinions) will be reviewed and taken into account when putting together a RTP time line.

In the unlikely event the team student trainer is the only person present to make a RTP decision, he/she could be called upon to make a decision regarding a sideline RTP decision. If possible consultation will take place with onsite medical personnel. In all cases, the team student trainer will make every effort to take all factors into consideration when making the decision.

If a certified athletic therapist is present, he/she will make the decision regarding a sideline RTP decision. As the certified athletic therapist deems fit, the RTP decision may be made in consultation with the coach and other qualified healthcare professionals.

### **Disciplinary Action**

Failure to comply with the medical advice from either the VATC or a qualified healthcare professional places the safety, health, and possibly the life of the student-athlete in jeopardy. The well-being and future of Laurentian University Voyageur student-athletes must always take precedence.

By failing to comply with medical advice a student-athlete may put his/her self and the University in a civil liability situation. Clearly directed and written approval must be received prior to a Voyageur student-athlete's RTP.

Failure to comply with Laurentian University's RTP Policy will result in the following disciplinary action:

First Offence Student-Athlete 1 competition suspension, including practice time prior to the competition. This suspension can be carried forward to a future competitive season.

Coach 1 competition suspension, including practice time prior to the competition. This suspension can be carried forward to a future competitive season.

Second Offence Student-Athlete 3 competition suspension, including practice time between competitions. This suspension can be carried forward to a future competitive season.

Coach 3 competition suspension, including practice time between competitions. This suspension can be carried forward to a future competitive season.

Third Offence Student-Athlete Permanent suspension from Voyageur Athletics.

Coach Dismissal as a coach at Laurentian University

These levels of disciplinary action will be imposed after failing to comply with the policy. A coach is in violation for each offence committed.

### **References**

1. Flint, Frances and Weiss, Maureen. *Returning Injured Athletes to Competition: A Role and Ethical Dilemma*. Canadian Journal of Sport Science. 17:1, 34-40, 1992.
2. Flint, Frances. *A Discussion of the Rights of Injured Athletes*. Unpublished manuscript, University of Oregon, 1987.

*original signed: August 23, 2001 by Mark A. Hazlett, Chair, Interuniversity Athletics*