

Being The Team Doctor

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As a Sports Physician team coverage makes up an important part of my week. I have been lucky enough to be the club doctor at St George Illawarra for the last 5 years. This has been on the back of an association with a number of junior and sub-elite teams over the years. More recently I have had the pleasure of looking after the City Origin team and this year have been given the challenge of being the Australian Kangaroos doctor.



2006 St George Illawarra team after beating Manly 26-0 in 1st Qualifying Final

Team coverage certainly adds a lot of variety to your working week. Approximately half of my time is spent with the football team. This includes match day coverage, a post game review of injuries and a pre-game check for fitness to play. This adds a nice balance to seeing private patients in my rooms for the rest of the week. The football work is really aimed at acute injury management of various muscle, joint and bone conditions, whereas clinic work tends more towards overuse and degenerative conditions.

A significant challenge of this type of team care is getting the players back on the paddock as quickly as possible. There obviously needs to be a balance between the needs of the player and team to get back playing, and ensuring the safe return from the injury itself, both in terms of acute injury recurrence and long term consequences. This desire to 'push the envelope' can lead to some stressful decisions, but the players' health always comes first. Generally a collaborative approach of the player, medical and coaching staff will give an acceptable result to all involved, and there are no occasions that I can remember ever being pushed to play a player who is unfit. There have, however, been a few nervous moments on the sidelines hoping that a player isn't going to break down and leave the team short (and the medical staff red faced!)

A real upside to this for private patients is the knowledge it gives for getting the 'weekend warriors' better, faster. Experience with aggressive acute injury management allows us to know what treatment and rehabilitation facilitates a faster return to work and normal activities.



The 2007 City staff after a 12-6 victory against Country in Coffs Harbour, coached by Tim Sheens

Going into camp with the Kangaroos this year was a great experience. Undoubtedly a test match is the pinnacle of Rugby League and the sheer athleticism of those assembled was unparalleled. Any team that can boast the likes of Lockyer, Thurston, Inglis, Folau and Slater is always going to be hard to beat. Our only real concern for the week was the well documented ankle sprain to Billy Slater. Luckily this was on the minor end of the spectrum, but was managed very aggressively, allowing him to play just 3 days later without adverse affect. This was another example when knowledge of what injuries can and can't be pushed and a collaborative approach to deciding on fitness to play is paramount.



Dr Annett with the 2009 Trans Tasman Cup. Australia beat New Zealand 38-10