

Guest Column: Lifesaving cardiac screening should Be routine for young athletes

February 6, 2023



The recent “Monday Night Football” game between the Buffalo Bills and the Cincinnati Bengals was suddenly suspended, and the last thing on fans’ minds was the game’s outcome. Bills safety Damar Hamlin collapsed without warning after what appeared to be a routine tackle due to cardiac arrest. The entire sports world stopped to offer messages of support and hope for Hamlin and the Bills.

We can all agree witnessing a traumatic event of this nature will give us pause to reflect on our own health and the health of our loved ones. As a parent of young athletes, I feel obligated to spread awareness of what can be done to better prepare families and youth sports organizations.

Cardiac arrest is not the same as a heart attack, although nearly every heart condition, including a heart attack, can cause cardiac arrest. What happened to Hamlin may seem rare, but it is a condition that young athletes and their families should be aware. The most important lesson from this is: Education and prevention save lives.

For nearly 15 years, a nonprofit organization has been dedicated to teaching this lesson to young athletes’ families. The MCORE Foundation began in response to losing a loved one during a routine basketball practice due to a sudden cardiac arrest.

The founders of MCORE created an automated assessment tool and screening program offered directly to schools and their athletic communities to ensure serving athletes was convenient and cost-effective for families. Assessments use electrocardiogram and echocardiography screening to locate undetected heart abnormalities in young athletes that could lead to sudden cardiac arrest.

The American Heart Association reports 9,500 youths are affected by what the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute considers a public health issue. Sudden cardiac arrest is the leading cause of sudden death in exercising young athletes.

Sharing this vitally important screening information with families can make all the difference in the lives of loved ones.

Today, the MCORE Foundation's automated system is still the only program offering preventive baseline testing and is saved in family accounts to use with medical providers.

Since its founding, the MCORE Foundation has expanded its efforts and reach by providing awareness, education and screenings for individuals regardless of their ability to pay. They are continually fundraising to further promote this recently expanded mission toward families and their communities.

The mission of MCORE is to provide education and screening and to enable research for sudden cardiac arrest for children and young adults. This mission is maintained by providing the highest standard of care mobile cardiac screenings outside a clinical setting, with screenings conducted by certified cardiac sonographers and read by pediatric cardiologists. Yet, the success of these programs requires more than just the willingness of families to participate. Attention to young athletes' heart health requires the constant support of schools and youth sports organizations.

The Hamlin episode was a wake-up call for families — one that demands our awareness and resources for the betterment of our youth sports organizations and the young athletes who participate in them. Education and understanding heart health conditions can ultimately make a difference in saving a young person's life.

Watching our young athletes excel in the sports they love should be a rewarding, uplifting and sometimes thrilling experience. The MCORE focus on education, screening and research related to sudden cardiac arrest can help to ensure this by providing families with valuable information regarding potential cardiac abnormalities and essential training to assist in the event of a cardiac incident.

As we pray for Hamlin's recovery, we must make certain our schools, sports organizations and teams make it routine to offer these lifesaving education and preventive screening programs for young athletes to reduce the risk of horrific events.

ABOUT THE WRITER

Lisa Tennenbaum is the executive director of the MCORE Foundation. She wrote this for InsideSources.com.

