Pregnancy and the Student Athlete

CSM Foundation Cruise, 2007

Jennifer C. Branchcomb, M.Ed., ATC/L

HISTORY

- In March 2003, Tara Brady, former women's basketball player at Sacred Heart University in Connecticut, filed a lawsuit in federal court claiming the university violated Title IX of the Education Amendment of 1972
- During the summer of 2001 Brady discovered she was pregnant and revealed this to her coach
- According to Brady, her coach told her she would be a "distraction" and to leave school

❖ Wilson, 2003

HISTORY

- Brady asked for a medical redshirt, but this was never done and her scholarship was revoked
- In May 2002 her scholarship was reinstated; Brady alleges her coach refused to speak to her. She then left Sacred Heart and enrolled in another university
- The importance of this case is that it was the first to test a school's obligations to pregnant women under Title IX

❖ Wilson, 2003

National Athletic Trainers' Association

Medical Recommendations:

- Organizations cited:
  - ACSM: American College of Sports Medicine
  - SOGC: Society of Obstetrics and Gynaecology of Canada
  - ACOG: American College of Obstetrics & Gynecology
- Each individual must be assessed to establish personal fitness level, demands of activity, and medical considerations, including obstetrical history, in order to tailor exercise and athletic recommendations appropriate for that patient
- Potential for exercised induced hyperthermia – should not exercise at an intensity that will increase body temperature above 101F

❖ ACBSP Position Statement

National Athletic Trainers' Association

Medical Recommendations:

- Athletic Heart Rate
  - ACOG 140 bpm – less
  - ACSM uses pulse rate, RPE, or "talk test"
    - Does not advocate conventional THR zones because RHR increases & MHR decreases later in gestation
  - SOGC

Maternal Age (yrs)	THR Zone (BPM)
< 20	140-155
20-29	135-150
30-39	130-145
>40	125-140

❖ ACBSP Position Statement

Medical Recommendations:

- Caloric Intake:
  - 2300-2500 during 1st trimester
  - 2500-2700 during 2nd/3rd trimesters
    - this does not include additional caloric expenditure of physical activity

❖ ACBSP Position Statement

National Athletic Trainers' Association

Medical Recommendations:

- Recommended Activities:
  - ACOG: walking, jogging, swimming, tennis, golf, bowling, alpine skiing on "safe slopes"
  - SOGC: rhythmic exercises w/ large muscle groups, walking, swimming, low impact aerobics, Kegel's, modified abdominals side-lying or standing (after 1st trimester)

❖ ACBSP Position Statement

National Athletic Trainers' Association

Medical Recommendations:

- Recommended Activities (cont.):
  - ACSM: NW bearing (cycling or swimming), walking, avoid sports that include a risk of abdominal trauma or loss of balance or coordination

❖ ACBSP Position Statement

Medical Recommendations:

- Activities to avoid :
  - ACOG: prolonged strenuous exercise, especially in hot weather; water skiing, diving, surfing, scuba diving, any dehydration
  - SOGC: overheating, anaerobic exercise or exercising to MHR, sports that require increased balance, coordination, or the potential for injury (downhill skiing, mountain climbing, water skiing)
  - ACSM: d/c training for competition, weight training is controversial, no flexibility exercises or increased temps
    - ACBSP Position Statement

National Athletic Trainers' Association

Medical Recommendations:

- Discontinue all exercise if:
  - vaginal bleeding, shortness of breath prior to exercise, dizziness, headache, chest pain, calf pain/swelling, pre-term labor, decreased fetal movement, muscle weakness, amniotic fluid leakage

❖ NCAA, 2002

National Athletic Trainers' Association

What Does the NCAA Recommend?

- No studies have specifically addressed the pregnant student athlete (S-A)
- It follows most recommendations by ACOG
- Safety to participate in each sport must be dictated by the movements and physical demands required to compete in that sport

❖ NCAA, 2002

What Does the NCAA Recommend?

- Avoid participation in competitive contact sports after 14th week; based on documentation from fetal injury in falls/car accidents
- Team physician, ob-gyn, & athlete should work together
- If S-A decides to compete: document medical condition and risks; have S-A sign it and place it in S-A's med record

❖ NCAA, 2002

National Athletic Trainers' Association

Guidelines for Team Physicians:

- It is essential to
  - Recognize the s/s of pregnancy
  - Understand that absolute and relative contraindications to exercise throughout pregnancy exist

❖ Herring, et al 2003

National Athletic Trainers' Association

Guidelines for Team Physicians:

- Be familiar with
  - basic physiological changes associated with pregnancy and post partum period
  - sport specific risks and benefits of exercise in pregnancy
  - effects of medications on maternal/fetal health
  - medical and obstetrical conditions affecting participation and performance

❖ Herring, et al 2003

Guidelines for Team Physicians:

- Specific considerations
  - nutritional needs, environmental risks, appropriate use of imaging, contraindications for physical therapy modalities
- Facilitate obstetric care and treatment
  - including referral

❖ Herring, et al 2003

Title IX's role:

- Prohibits ANY form of discrimination "on the basis of sex" by an institution covered by the statute. It has been applied in 4 main areas: athletes, single-sex education, sexual harassment, and pregnancy.

❖ Grossman, 2003

National Athletic Trainers' Association

Title IX's role:

- In the area of pregnancy, parental status, & marital status, regulations set by the Office of Civil Rights in the Department of Education and court interpretations have applied Title IX's broad ban on sex discrimination. They, along with interpretations of Title IX generally, impose 3 basic requirements on schools with regard to pregnant students….
  - Grossman, 2003

Title IX's role:

- Do not treat a student worse because of her pregnancy
- Accommodate pregnancy like a temporary disability
- Allow pregnant students to take temporary leave

❖ Grossman, 2003

NCAA Bylaws Are Confusing:

- If an athlete becomes injured, shows up out of shape, or cannot compete for another medical reason the institution cannot take scholarship away, but it does not mention pregnancy
- If the athlete voluntarily withdraws from the team for any reason (pregnancy) - institution may cancel the scholarship
- Pregnancy is an allowable reason for an extension of 5-year eligibility clock

❖ Myers, 2004

School Policy:

- Institution must have a clear written policy on how to handle S-A pregnancy to include:
  - Information on the pregnant athlete's eligibility options and right to participate
  - Assurance of confidentiality regarding athlete's medical condition
  - Prohibition against coaches counseling athletes on issues relating to pregnancy

❖ The Women's Sports Foundation, 2004

School Policy:

- Institution may not prohibit S-A from competing: physician and athlete determine length of participation and activity restrictions
- Institution may not test for pregnancy or require proof of being pregnant as a condition for competition

❖ The Women's Sports Foundation, 2004

National Athletic Trainers' Association

School Policy:

- It is the athlete's obligation to report her condition to her coach and should be no different than the obligation to inform of other medical conditions
- The decision is at the discretion of the athlete, in accordance with the school rules regarding release of medical info to coaching personnel
  - The Women's Sports Foundation, 2004

Result of Lawsuit?

- Sacred Heart University admitted no wrong-doing in the case, but did agree to clarify its existing policy prohibiting all discrimination on the basis of sex. All other terms remained confidential.

❖ Press Release, 2003

Recent Cases in the News…

- Clemson University, 2007
- Syracuse University, 2007
- University of Memphis, 2004
- University of Louisville, 2003

Summary:

- Team physician, ob-gyn, & S-A make decision regarding participation: ATC & coach may monitor athlete's participation, but also document it and file it
- No discrimination "on the basis of sex"
  - Do not treat worse because of pregnancy
  - Accommodate like a temporary disability
  - Allow S-A to take temporary leave
- Most important: have a school policy as well as create a safe environment that encourages the S-A to seek help and counseling rather than hide her pregnancy

Bibliography

- American Chiropractic Board of Sports Physicians (ACBSP), Position Statement on Exercise and Athletic Participation During Pregnancy
- Grossman, Joanna. A New Lawsuit By a Female Athlete Tests Title IX's Protection Against Pregnancy Discrimination, May 6, 2003
- Herring, et al. Female Issues for the Team Physician: A Consensus Statement. Med. Sci. Sports Exerc. 1758-1793, 2003
- Myers, Susan. In A league of Her Own. Nursing Spectrum, 2004
- NCAA Sports Medicine Handbook, June 2002
- Press Release, Sacred Heart University and Tara Brady, October 21, 2003
- Wilson, Jenelle. Universities Need to Ensure Policies on Pregnant Students do not Violate Title IX, September 19, 2003
- The Women's Sports Foundation, Position Statement, April 12, 2004