

The Loss of Young Healthy Athletes

It was rumored that a young college basketball player was a potential top pick in the professional basketball draft, but during a game midseason, he experienced arrhythmias (irregular rhythms of the heart beating). After the symptoms occurred, he was immediately removed from the game and was treated. Tragically, three months later, during a tournament, he collapsed and died. What was the cause of death? Sudden cardiac arrest. Statistics do show that this condition is rare, but what is cardiac arrest? And why has sudden cardiac arrest taken the lives of such strong, fit athletes?

In its simplest terms sudden cardiac arrest usually results from an abrupt loss of heart function. Sudden cardiac arrest can occur in anyone and especially athletes with preexisting heart conditions. The athlete may or may not have diagnosed heart disease. The time and mode of death are unexpected, usually occurring minutes after symptoms happen.

What causes sudden cardiac death? All known heart diseases can lead to cardiac arrest and sudden cardiac death. During intense physical or athletic activity, adrenaline is released and it often acts as the trigger for sudden cardiac death, but only when these conditions are present. There are many causes of sudden cardiac death in young athletes, but the most common is undetected hypertrophic cardiomyopathy (a condition where the heart muscle thickens). Athletes with a thin, complaint chest wall are at risk of common cordis (sudden cardiac arrest from a blunt, non penetrating blow to the chest) even when there is no cardiovascular disorder present. The blow could result from sports with baseballs, softballs, lacrosse balls, hockey pucks, or even a direct blow in boxing.

Are younger athletes' risks of cardiac arrest higher? Since, the diseases that do cause the condition are expressed earlier in life, younger athletes do have a greater chance of experiencing sudden cardiac arrest. For instance, high school students are at much greater risk than collegiate athletes who are at greater risk than professional athletes.

Can anything be done to prevent sudden cardiac arrest? For example, Robert J. Myerburg, MD, director of the division of cardiology and a professor of medicine and physiology at the University of Miami in Florida, is currently working to convince the state of Florida to include EKG's as part of a high school athlete's physical examination. Myerburg believes that EKG's could locate between fifty to seventy percent of athletes at risk. Also, people could be screened more effectively with a more simple and inexpensive test known as an echocardiogram. It is important to teach athletes good conditioning techniques. Educating athletes about the significance of cooling down after working out is extremely important. When you are active you will generate more wastes that need to be removed from the tissues. Schools, colleges, and professional teams should at least have personnel trained in CPR and a portable defibrillator nearby in case an arrest strikes. At the very least, all athletes should receive pre-participation exams.

At Heart and Health we pride ourselves to have the commitment to screen, prevent, and treat our patients. Any athletes with significant heart palpitations, increase heart rate, dizziness, should be screened and evaluated in order to prevent these unnecessary tragedies. For more information please visit our website at [Hearth and Health.com](http://HearthandHealth.com)

David Kavesteen MD FACC

Heart and Health PLLC

La Grande Place

1350 Deer Park Ave.

North Babylon, NY, 11703 (631)-482-1355