

February 1, 2017

To: Michael Schill  
President

From: Tim Gleason  
Faculty Athletics Representative

**RE: Football Student Athletes Strength and Conditioning**

Following the [REDACTED] of the UO Football team you asked me to provide a report on the circumstances leading to the players [REDACTED] and their well-being during and after the episode.

In order to gain a full picture I read all of the primary journalism stories and the statements from the Athletic Department, interviewed administrators, coaches and staff in the Athletic Department and in Services for Student Athletes (Jaqua Center), met with the three student athletes, and met with the entire Football team. Everyone in the Athletic Department and the Jaqua Center cooperated fully and expressed a strong commitment to the health and well-being of all UO student athletes.

In the first week of the winter term the football team began a series of introductory "warm up" strength and conditioning sessions. The sessions are designed to be a relatively short (less than 15 minutes if all exercises successfully completed) set of body-weight exercises followed by a weight-lifting session. This followed a nearly six-week break since the team's last game of the 2016 season and the arrival of a new football coaching staff. In years when the team plays in a bowl game the break in formal workout sessions is substantially shorter. The sessions involved all student athletes on the team roster who were medically cleared for participation. They were divided into groups that meet at different times starting with a 6:00 am session, followed by two later sessions each morning. The three student athletes who were hospitalized were in the 6:00 am session.

New Football Strength and Conditioning Coach Irele Oderinde was in charge of the workouts. He had been on campus for only a matter of days. Other new and veteran UO coaches and trainers were present during the workouts, and a

number of football position coaches attended parts of the sessions over the course of the week.

The goals for the workouts included team-building, evaluating the condition of the student athletes and establishing expectations for the team under a new coaching staff. The student athletes were told that they could pull out of the exercises at any time and could take a break if necessary. The coaches and trainers present did pull some student athletes out of the exercises when they exhibited physical symptoms of exhaustion, but it is clear that some student athletes did not believe it was acceptable to drop out and did not exhibit physical symptoms during the workouts.

The workouts consisted of a series of body-weight exercises (push ups, up downs, sit ups, body plank squats, plank holds) repeated over four days. The number of repetitions varied across the week. If one student athlete failed to complete a repetition, everyone in the group was required to redo that repetition until everyone successfully completed it. The 6:00 am group had more difficulty than the other groups and as a result did more repetitions.

Following the workouts later in the week, a number of student athletes reported abnormal physical symptoms generally related to excessive physical activity. They brought these symptoms to the attention of the training and medical staff. After examination and testing [REDACTED]

Staff and student athletes did not find the nature or the structure of the workouts to be outside the norms of traditional football strength and conditioning workouts, however the intensity of the workouts was greater than usual. Many players took issue with the press reports that used terms such as “military-style” to describe the workouts, saying that the reports were overblown and sensational. Coach Oderinde stated that the workouts were consistent with workouts he has used for many years without incident and that the intent of the workout was not, as some observers have suggested, to “weed out” student athletes. Other staff present at the workouts confirmed that the instructions to the student athletes stressed team-building and encouraged them to step out if they were struggling.

Based on conversations with student athletes it is clear that they viewed these workouts as an important opportunity to make a first impression and to make a statement about their commitment to “getting better.” While it was permissible to stop out of the workout if an individual student athlete felt the need to do so, and some student athletes did, the general consensus was that it would be

“quitting” to do so. As a result, some student athletes, including [REDACTED], pushed themselves to extremes to complete the workouts.

In my meeting with the football team, there were two messages the student athletes wanted me to include in this report: (1) “Coach O” has their respect and support. A number of team members expressed disagreement with the decision to suspend him; and (2) Several team members believe the team should have been consulted before any action was taken. Absent broader student-athlete input, there was a perception that decisions had been made with less than full information.

At the same time, medical and athletic performance staffs identified factors in the “perfect storm” (a term I heard repeatedly) that may have contributed to the hospitalization of three student athletes:

- It was the first set of formal workouts for players who had not been in formal workouts for a highly unusual extended period of time due to not playing in a bowl game for the first time since 2004.
- It was the first time the new football staff had worked with these student athletes.
- It was an opportunity for the student athletes to make a first impression with their new coaches.
- Given the early start time for the 6:00 am session, it is likely that the student athletes did not properly hydrate before the workout. [REDACTED]
- The student athletes in the 6:00 am session had no idea about the session expectation. Later groups were alerted by the 6:00 am group and were better prepared.
- As the result of having a mixture of players with substantially different body weights doing the same body weight workout, heavier players faced a much greater challenge than lighter players. [REDACTED].
- Because many of the coaches involved have just arrived on campus, communication among the coaches, trainers, staff and student athletes was less than ideal.

The factors identified by coaches and staff indicate a failure to follow two general best practices identified by the NCAA:

- [N]ew student-athletes and those coming back to campus after a break may need an opportunity to acclimate and...coaches and strength and conditioning professionals should take that into consideration.<sup>1</sup>
- It is the responsibility of the strength and conditioning coach to thoroughly evaluate the level of conditioning of all new and returning athletes and to properly prescribe the appropriate training volume, load and intensity to protect the health and safety of each student-athlete.<sup>2</sup>

UO Athletics training and medical staff acted quickly once alerted to the student athlete symptoms. The student athletes who alerted staff that they were experiencing problems were tested and treated immediately. The student athletes praised the training and medical staff members.



All [redacted] student athletes are [redacted] [redacted] expected to fully recover.

As noted earlier, the Athletic department has vigorously expressed its commitment to prevent any similar event in the future. Actions taken to date include:

- All strength and conditioning coaches, trainers and medical staff now report to the Director of Performance and Sports Science. This change in reporting structure reflects a commitment to a multidisciplinary applied sport science approach to athlete performance. It allows for coordinated treatment of all student athletes and removes sport coaches from any influence over medical decisions.
- Onboarding: The transition to a new football coaching staff at a critical time in the football recruiting cycle placed great stress on the Athletic department. It is examining how to better integrate new coaching and other staff into the department and to improve communication among old and new staff.

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<sup>1</sup> Lawrence, Marta. "Experts stress need for acclimation with conditioning drills, NCAA.org. <http://www.ncaa.org/health-and-safety/nutrition-and-performance/experts-stress-need-acclimation-conditioning-drills>

<sup>2</sup> 2014-15 NCAA Sports Medicine Handbook, p30.

- Credentials: While Coach Oderinde has the base level of strength and conditioning credentials required by NCAA bylaws, the department is evaluating its expectations for initial credentials and ongoing training for all strength and conditioning coaches. Coach Oderinde indicated that he is committed to ongoing training.

In conclusion, this was an avoidable crisis that resulted in student athletes being placed in danger. Once it occurred, the Athletic department and Jaqua Center staff treated the student athletes with care and professionalism, and immediately took preventative actions to benefit student-athlete welfare going forward.