

Pediatric Cardiologist Says Sudden Death in Young Athletes is a Quiet Killer

Sudden death for football fans is only a tiebreaker. But for the families who have lost young athletes to sudden death from heart complications, it is a tragedy.

Hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, long Q-T syndrome and Wolff-Parkinson-White syndrome are just some of the "quiet" killers of a segment of today's teen-age athletes, says a Baylor College of Medicine pediatric cardiologist.

"What is devastating is that most of these young people appear perfectly normal, but then, during the stress of athletics, they die from

heart failure," said Dr. Jeffrey Towbin, an assistant professor of pediatrics and molecular genetics at Baylor. "Many were aware they had heart conditions, but how many were never evaluated and monitored? If we knew they were at risk, we could recommend therapies and possibly prevent them from participating in sports."

While the number of sudden deaths among both athletes and non-athletes under age 22 is low — less than one percent — statistics show that a city of one million will lose 15 to 20 young people in a year. For a school losing a star quarterback or

a popular basketball player, the emotional toll can be considerable.

"These are kids in their prime," Towbin said. "Their numbers may not be great, but their deaths are very noticeable."

Chief among the causes of sudden death is hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, a genetically transmitted heart condition causing defects in the left ventricle, the main pumping station for the body's blood supply. Death occurs when the ventricle thickens, impeding blood flow or from heart rhythm disturbances called arrhythmia.

Recent studies by the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute

showed that in one study group of 29 athletes who died between the ages of 13-30, 76 percent had cardiovascular disorders, mainly hypertrophic cardiomyopathy.

Long Q-T syndrome is the most sinister of silent heart conditions, because in children there are rarely symptoms prior to sudden death. The disorder results from irregularities in the heart's natural rhythm leading to seizures, sudden fainting and death.

The "Q-T" refers to measurements of heart rhythm from electrocardiogram readings. People with long Q-T measurements are at high risk for cardiac problems.

"Although they may show no prior symptoms, long Q-T patients can be diagnosed early on," Towbin said.

Another cause of sudden death in athletes, Wolff-Parkinson-White

syndrome, also results from abnormal heart rhythms caused when the left ventricle is stimulated prematurely by electrical waves gone awry.

Three-on-Three Tourney Now Registering Players

Team registration for the 5th Annual Hot Hoops Three-on-three basketball tournament is now being held through Aug. 31.

The event will be held Sept. 11-12 on the streets of downtown Raleigh. The tournament, which is a

benefit for North Carolina Special Olympics, is open to anyone at least 10 years old. Last year, the tournament netted over \$32,000 for NCSO.

Hot Hoops is the only major outdoor, three-on-three basketball tournament in Raleigh played in a

playground-style atmosphere. The 1992 tournament attracted 1,6000 players and over 15,000 spectators.

Winners of the top men's and women's divisions will advance to the Hoop-It-Up National Three-On-Three Tournament regional playoff.

To register, each team must submit a registration form and a \$100 non-refundable entry fee by Aug. 31.

Registration forms may be found in the *Raleigh News & Observer*, or for more information call 1-800-843-NCSO.



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