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PRESS RELEASE

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Youth Sports-Related Injuries: Prevention is the Key

June 2, 2009: There are many wide-ranging benefits gained through youth participation in sports, including the promotion of a healthy lifestyle, the development of cooperative skills and leadership qualities, and the opportunity to further develop social skills. Every year, more and more youth are participating in organized sports. The U.S. Center for Disease Control (CDC) estimates that approximately 7.2 million high school students participated in organized sports in 2005-2006 – Nearly twice as many as compared to 20 years ago. When this number is expanded to include children of all ages, it is estimated that 30-35 million are involved in organized sports. Along with this rise in athletic participation has been a rise in youth sports-related injuries. Studies show that high school athletes account for an estimated 2 million injuries, 500,000 doctor visits, and 30,000 hospitalizations annually. It is concerning that there has been a documented four-fold increase in overuse injuries since 2000 by the CDC, accounting for 30-50% of all youth sports injuries. Overuse injuries are typically caused by overtraining, inadequate recovery time, and/or ongoing weakness and inflexibility. This type of injury commonly presents as a nagging, continuous pain or ache which may or may not affect performance, usually lasting beyond activity and even at rest In many cases, even minor injuries can become serious if not properly cared for, leading to longer periods of missed participation and potentially causing long-term structural damage.

As a parent, what can one do to significantly decrease the risk of these injuries (especially overuse) occurring in his or her child? Fortunately, there are many proven approaches that have demonstrated notable decreases in injury risk in youth.

1. Be sure that a thorough pre-season health screening is performed by a qualified medical professional
2. Seek the assistance of a trained professional (i.e. certified athletic trainer, physical therapist, or strength & conditioning specialist) to identify any risk factors, such as strength/flexibility deficits, biomechanical issues, and loose joints or anatomical malalignments. These professionals can address any risk factors found through evaluation.
3. Provide protective equipment as appropriate, and be sure that this equipment is periodically inspected for proper fit and function
4. Avoid specializing heavily in any single sport or single position (i.e. do not just play soccer year round…choose another sport/activity to replace it at least 1 season, such as swimming)
5. Practice proper nutritional and hydration habits (if unsure, seek advice from a trained professional)

6. When an injury occurs, allow adequate time for recovery. There should not be an increase in pain with activity, and there should not be compensations occurring (such as a limp)
    a. When pain affects participation, they should be evaluated by a qualified medical professional (i.e orthopedic doctor, certified athletic trainer, or physical therapist) who can help get them return to play as safely as possible and quickly as is appropriate.

More and more research is being presented that demonstrates the importance of preventative sports medicine. An area that has received a significant amount of research deals with anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) injuries. An estimated 150,000 people suffer ACL injuries each year in the United States. A growing number of them are female athletes. Special programs, such as the *P.E.P. warm-up* and the *"11+"*, are targeted towards reducing the risk factors associated with ACL injuries, especially shown in females. These programs aim to improve biomechanics and body control, as well has improve strength and balance. One study conducted the National Collegiate Athletic Association, which included 1,435 players on 61 women's soccer teams, found that teams using the *P.E.P.* program suffered no ACL injuries, compared to six injuries on the teams which did not use the program. Another study of 765 high school athletes found a 62% reduction of ankle and knee injuries on teams which implemented injury prevention programs compared to the previous school year's injury rates.

One local business that is trying to help decrease the occurrence of youth sports injuries is Millbrook Orthopedic & Sports Physical Therapy, in Millbrook, NY. Biomechanical screenings and strength/flexibility testing can reveal weak links that hinder optimum performance and increase risk of injury. "Our goals are to provide local youth athletes with quick access to medical care and advice for their athletic injuries, as well as demonstrate and implement the many benefits of preventative sports medicine," states Ryan Stevens, MPS, ATC, CSCS. "We offer an *Injury Prevention Program*, as well as free injury consultations, to help athletes decrease their risk of sports injuries, as well as help get them back on the field as safely and responsibly as possible when injuries do occur."

For more information on injury prevention, visit www.millbrookpt.com/helpful-information.html .