

Lifeline to Bulldog athletes

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Many fans see the people that sprint onto the football field carrying six-packs of water to the players during timeouts before sprinting off the field right before the game restarts.

These students are not groupies, friends of the football team, or the coaches' sons and daughters. They're athletic trainers, not to be confused with just "trainers," a term that athletic trainers have tried to distance themselves from because they say "trainers" have less schooling.

Krista Bayers and Shelby LaMendola are the two undergraduate students assigned to the football team after hundreds of observation hours.

Both are in their second and final year in the kinesiology athletic training accreditation program at Fresno State.

The athletic training team for the football team has five members. There are two undergraduate students, two graduate assistants and a head trainer, all working on the sidelines to make sure the Fresno State football team can perform.

Many fans hardly notice the athletic trainers and think that they are just "water girls," but the water supply is not even a fraction of what the girls, and guys, do for a football team.

Water is the most time consuming and physical part of the program, and the most visible, which leads to the misconception that the people supplying the water are untrained.



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Joseph Vasquez / The Collegian

Another mistaken belief is that there are only females in the program when the field is actually dominated by males.

"We're there for any cuts, scrapes, bruises, hits to the head, everything," LaMendola said.

The athletic trainers use water as a tool to gain consistent contact with the players.

Bayers said that the decision to let them keep playing starts with the athletic trainers.

"When the players come off the field, we hand them water and if there's something wrong with them we're going to see it," Bayers said. "We see if they're bleeding, if they have a concussion, we give them a quick full body scan."

Bayers and LaMendola set up for practice two to three hours before it starts and the day before games they spend over 12 hours preparing the players.

The day of a home game they are at the field setting up supplies six hours before game time.

The athletic training undergraduate students are the first line of defense for the players to prevent injury.

"It's our responsibility to know the players, to make sure they know our names and that we know theirs so that we can spot changes in the players," Bayers said. "We need to see if there's a little bit of a different walk, or if a player is holding his shoulder a bit oddly, we even notice facial expressions so we can tell there is something wrong with an athlete."

At practice, Bayers, LaMendola and the three other athletic trainers follow around their respective groups, bringing everything from med-packs and tape to inhalers and contacts with them to each drill.

"If the players are running to a drill, we're running to the drill," Bayers said.

Not only do the athletic trainers deal with broken fingers, sprained knees and concussions, they make sure the players are not getting sick. LaMendola said the athletic trainers are involved in total, complete healthcare.

"We're expected to maintain a good relationship with the players and coaches and we're expected to ask questions and know what's going on," LaMendola said.

If the student athletic trainers can't diagnose a problem, they send it up the line to the athletic training graduate students. From there the graduate students send it to the head trainer and, if needed, to the team doctors.

As for the "water" misconceptions, the athletic trainers may not like it, but they are passionate enough about their work to laugh off the term.

"Mainly it's that people think we're not educated, that we're not there for a purpose and that we just get to hang out with the team all day," LaMendola said.

Instead, the athletic trainers are making sure every player is ready to play anyone, anytime, anywhere.

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