

Energy Drinks—Coaches Beware

Here is another thing that we coaches need to watch and pass on to our players. Players now days think they have to have every advantage possible and the "in" thing is all of the energy drinks that have popped up. The main problem with them is the amount that is being used, an occasional one won't hurt anyone like in my college days it was NO DOZ while studying for finals. However, it didn't take long to find out that taking NO DOZ may have helped you stay awake while studying but the down side was falling asleep during the final the next day. That tends to hurt the grade a little also.

Drinks like Gatorade and Powerade have benefits for a lot of athletes or workers but in certain situations. But these drinks are used way more often then needed. These drinks are the most helpful when the conditions during practices, games or working outside are intense and are in hot and humid conditions. The body is sweating a lot and losing important fluids during the events. Those do need to be replaced by these drinks. Most of the athletes that on in the commercials for these drinks are professional players who work very hard during their practices and games. But for the normal person who is working out some at the gym, playing or practicing but are not doing intense activity for at least 90 minutes in extremely hot conditions drinking these types of drinks is overkill. Just drinking plain water is fine and adequate.

Having the vending machines outside the gyms is for marketing purposes more than the needs of the people buying the product. We checked our player's diets for a week and one player has a Gatorade or two everyday during the school day. There is no way she needs to drink Gatorade at that time when she is sitting in class. The problem with drinking these types of energy drinks is the calorie content which could be 300 calories a bottle for a small one and on up depending on how much they drink. So the player is taking in a lot of calories without much benefit unless in those certain type of extreme conditions. These calories can really add up on a player especially those who have a tendency to gain weight.

Another topic recently studied is about the energy drinks that contain high levels of caffeine and other stimulants that are not listed. These drinks are putting kids and young adults at risk of serious health problems. Of course, these drinks are not regulated so the consumer really doesn't know everything that may be in one of these drinks. The beverages are classified as nutritional supplements so the US Food and Drug Administration does not require proof from the manufacturers that they are safe or effective.

In studies done by the University of Miami (ABC News), they found cases of seizures, delusions, heart problems, and kidney/liver damages when studying drinks like Red Bull, Spike shooter and Redline. The study team showed not only how young adults are affected by the drinks but that they accounts for half of the projected \$9 billion sales of non-alcoholic energy drinks.

Even though the product manufacturer's claim enhanced mental and physical performance, the study found that the drinks are linked with serious adverse effects, especially in children to young adults and could not verify the claims enhancements that the manufacturers claimed. Caffeine overdose is also on the rise with more than 5,000 caffeine overdose cases reported in 2007. Almost half of these cases occurring in youths aged 18 or younger.

The serious part of this problem is that these drinks contain a lot of other substances besides a lot of caffeine and they are not regulated by the government. Young people with heart disease, seizures, diabetes, high blood pressure or attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) should avoid the drinks altogether.

Energy drinks that are often loaded with caffeine, sugar and herbal stimulants may have various health risks associated with them according to Dr. Edward Laskowski (Mayo Clinic.com), including:

- restlessness and irritability-excessive caffeine is associated with headaches, tremors, nausea and insomnia adding to irritability, restlessness and nervousness.
- increased blood pressure-the caffeine in energy drinks can increase your blood pressure and make your heart beat faster which can trigger, in some cases, dangerous changes in heart rhythm. Combining these drinks with alcohol makes the heart beat even faster which becomes an even bigger problem.

- possible dehydration-the results of studies are mixed when it comes to proclaiming that caffeine increases the risk of dehydration.

- weight gain-the sugar in most energy drinks can contribute to weight gain in those who do not exercise regularly, exercise intensely enough or have struggled with weight gain.

These drinks in excessive amounts have been associated with manic episodes, seizures, chest pain, heart attacks and sudden cardiac death. Drink them in moderation and only after at least 60-90 minutes of strenuous exercise.

We as adult coaches and parents have to guide the young athletes and not promote the problem. We allowed our players to drink Gatorade only in extreme hot and/or humid conditions or after extreme workouts. We never allowed our players to drink the energy drinks that are on the market now to give them a boost of energy. We feel they are way too dangerous for them to drink and are not needed. According to IC Tech News, 30-50 % of US teenagers and young adults consume energy drinks even though they know there are hazards. About one third of those are between the ages of 12-14. We need to change that number.

We need to discuss these drinks with our players and tell them about the hazards. We also need to not look the other way if they are consuming these drinks nor provide them for the players. Too many players have been hospitalized already so please be aware of anyone on your team who is using these drinks in excess. Be safe not sorry.