



Introducing: Rick Knizek, Athletic Trainer/Concussion Management Coordinator at Shenendehowa High School, NYSPHSAA Section 2 Safety Committee Chair, and 2021 Kent Scriber Recognition Award Winner

Rick Knizek is the athletic trainer and concussion management coordinator at Shenendehowa High School, the New York State Public High School Athletic Association (NYSPHSAA) Section 2 Safety Committee Chair, and the 2021 Kent Scriber Recognition Award winner. Knizek was recognized at the 2021 NYSATA annual conference for his outstanding work promoting and supporting the goals and mission of NYSATA and the profession of athletic training in New York State.

Rick has been an athletic trainer for 25 years, 23 of which have been for Shenendehowa High School (Shen) where he is responsible for the evaluation, care, and treatment for more than 1,200 student-athletes spread out over three seasons. In addition, he handles all athletic and non-athletic related concussions for the school district.

Working at Shen is a full-circle moment for Knizek, as he attended the school, played various high school sports, and suffered injuries himself. “Going through rehab for injuries in high school was my first introduction to athletic training, and I was drawn to the idea that it mixed healthcare and sports together. Once I went to college and took an introduction to AT class, I was pretty much hooked from there.”

When asked about his favorite memories throughout his career, he had a couple. Rick has been a medical provider for the U.S. Olympic Committee for 12 years, and he thoroughly enjoys being able to learn from such high caliber medical providers and athletes so he can take back what he has learned for his own students. Additionally, Rick is grateful for the opportunities his position at Shen has afforded him.

“We are lucky at Shen to work with some amazing athletes that often go on to state championship situations. I love watching my students get to participate in something for which they’ve worked so hard. Most recently, I’ve had two student-athletes go on to professional sports for Atlanta Hawks basketball and Atlanta Braves baseball. It’s a rewarding feeling to see them succeed,” said Knizek.

Receiving the Kent Scriber Recognition Award was also a rewarding feeling for Rick. “My first reaction was of surprise. There are so many hard-working and talented athletic trainers in our profession so the fact that I was chosen out of a state-wide pool of people was a bit surprising. I also feel very privileged for the recognition. Being an AT can sometimes feel like a thankless profession, so it felt really good to be recognized,” he said.

Knizek’s work as the NYSPHSAA Section 2 Safety Committee Chair had great weight in his winning the award. He served as the NYSATA Representative to the NYSPHAA COVID-19 Task Force where he provided invaluable guidance and insight for how schools should return safely to sports. He was a leader on the task force, which met 10 times throughout the summer, and dedicated his personal time to the force as



well. Beyond the meetings, he spent more than 12 hours at home, researching, writing, and re-writing guidelines to help schools determine safety guidelines to minimize risk for academic sports. This dedication throughout the pandemic impacted each and every school district throughout New York State.

“Rick has been an invaluable resource for NYSATA by representing us at athletic administrators and physician conferences, as well as an AT voice on the NYSPHSAA Safety Committee,” said Aimee Brunelle, athletic trainer for Colonie Central High School. “His knowledge, experience, and dedication exemplifies how he is a committed and compassionate leader for NYSATA and the AT profession, and this is clear in every role he takes.”

For someone like Rick who has had such a long and illustrious career, he has learned some lessons along the way that he would pass forward to the newer generation of ATs. His biggest piece of advice is to be passionate about the job. The hours are long and working with a variety of people such as students, parents, patients, faculty, etc. can be straining so you must evaluate if you are right for that type of atmosphere.

He also stresses the ability to think outside the box. “Many situations’ ATs deal with can seem similar, but each injury is different. An AT needs to be able to problem solve and think on their feet to come up with the correct solution for the specific situation. Most of the time, it isn’t a one time fits all fix and you have to be prepared to analyze and act on anything that comes your way.”