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Capital Region Athletic Trainers Prepare for the Return of High School Sports

(Albany, NY) – After nearly six months of uncertainty, athletic trainers Aimee Brunelle, MS, ATC, of Colonie High School and Rick Knizek, MS, ATC, of Shenendehowa High School are preparing for student-athletes to safely return to sports.

All schools in the region will be adhering to recommended guidelines distributed by the New York State Public High School Athletic Association, which has announced that low to moderate risk sports can begin on September 21, 2020 and high contact sports such as football, volleyball, and cheerleading will return in spring 2021. All athletes must be medically cleared during the week of September 14 to participate. For each sport, layouts need to be modified so that individuals are at least six feet apart in all directions, particularly during field exercises, drills, and other practice activities. Equipment sharing should be discouraged, and they need to be cleaned and disinfected between each use. Face coverings are required for coaches, athletic trainers, and other individuals who are not directly engaged in physical activity. Individuals who are involved in a physical activity (e.g. practicing, playing) and cannot maintain six feet of distance must wear acceptable face coverings unless unable to tolerate.

“Our main priority is, and always has been, the health and safety of our student-athletes,” said Rick Knizek, athletic trainer and concussion management coordinator at Shenendehowa High School. “This year, that takes on a completely new meaning and way of screening our athletes to ensure they are ready to resume.”

While COVID-19 is always top of mind in regards to everyone’s safety, Brunelle and Knizek also worry about the increased risk of injury for student-athletes who have been unable to practice or workout at the same level as they did prior to the mandatory shut down. Both athletic trainers advise that student-athletes and coaches need to start slow. The down time this year has been longer than any other, and the need to build up fitness gradually is essential. In addition to starting slow, student-athletes can prepare for a return to sports by getting active now, specifically in terms of sport-specific movements.

Though concerns remain, students, parents, teachers, coaches, and staff are eager for sports to return. “I have found that parents want their children to return to sport,” said Aimee Brunelle, athletic trainer at Colonie High School. “They want their children to be safe, and to fully understand our procedures to keep their children healthy. But I believe they all recognize the importance of athletics in these students for physical and emotional/mental health. So, in general, they are supportive in starting up again.”

Knizek adds, “This has been an amazingly difficult time for all of us working with athletes, in schools and life in general. Despite the difficulties and the seemingly unknown, things will get better again. Kids will be back to school full time and athletics will continue to be an important and essential part of a student’s physical, mental, and emotional development. It may take a bit longer, but this too shall pass.”

To interview Aimee and Rick, or to learn more about this topic, please contact Susan Bardack at susan@buzzmediasolutions.com or 518.867.7940.

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ABOUT NEW YORK STATE ATHLETIC TRAINERS’ ASSOCIATION



NYSATA, founded in 1976 and incorporated in 1989, stands to advance the profession of athletic training for the purpose of enhancing the quality of healthcare for the physically active in New York State. Comprised of over 1,500 Certified Athletic Trainers, NYSATA (www.go2nysata.org) is the statewide affiliate of the regional Eastern Athletic Trainers' Association (EATA) and District Two of the [National Athletic Trainers' Association \(NATA\)](#).