# Accommodating NCAA's Guidelines on Prevention of Catastrophic Death and Injury via Technology

# Summary

The NCAA has ramped up regulations and guidelines for collegiate sports performance. Many recommendations can become administrative burdens on sports performance and sports medicine staff. TeamBuildr has already begun formatting its platform to accommodate for these regulations and helps sports performance programs comply in a streamlined way.

The NCAA has released its document in July of 2019 , Interassociation recommendations: Preventing catastrophic injury and death in collegiate athletes, in which they address “unified standards of care” in order to help prevent catastrophic injuries and deaths in collegiate athletes. These recommendations emerged and were developed from the 2016 NCAA Safety in College Football Summit where they were ultimately approved according to the Uniform Standard of Care procedures. The Uniform Standard of Care policy is a “procedural pathway that guides and facilitates communication the Committee on Competitive Safeguards and Medical Aspects of Sports (CSMAS) and the [NCAA] Board of Governors on issues of student-athlete health and safety.”

The document recommendations provide an Association-wide solution to mitigate catastrophic injury and death in collegiate athletes. The effective date of the document was August 1, 2019, meaning that this is the “starting line” for school adoption of the recommendations, which includes beginning the process of “determining alignment strategies with strength and conditioning professionals.” As stated by the NCAA Board of Governors, these recommendations apply to all athletics personnel, athletics health care administrators (AHCs), and anyone who has a role to play in the prevention of catastrophic injury and death in student-athletes, including coaches and their staff. The AHCs will have a special responsibility in that they will be the ones to ensure that the recommendations are broadly distributed among members of the athletic department.

Some of the outlined recommendations, such as developing a reporting structure for strength and conditioning professionals, can be immediately actionable at the institutional level. This White Paper aims to define specific best practices specifically to the strength and conditioning department that can be implemented with the use of the strength and conditioning software TeamBuildr.

To add further context as it applies to strength and conditioning departments, attorney Reed Wainwright interprets the letter to mean:

> ***Strength and Conditioning professionals should be proactive in implementing the Recommendations of this document. Foremost, the health and safety of the student-athlete should never be at risk as a result of the implementation of any strength and conditioning program. The strength and conditioning coach's failure to follow the Recommendations would be considered negligent if a catastrophic injury and/or death occurred during the implementation of the strength and conditioning program.***
>
> ***A policies and procedures manual is an essential component for all strength and conditioning departments including… detailed descriptions of strength and conditioning programs for all sports.***
>
> ***All strength and conditioning sessions should be evidence or consensus based, be sport-specific, implement a proper progression, be adequately supervised and never be administered for punishment.***

# Prevention of Non-Traumatic Injuries and Death

Many non-traumatic deaths take place during the first week of activity of a transition period of training ( ie: reporting to pre-season training). According to the letter, it takes 7-10 days for the body to acclimatize to the physiologic and environmental stresses placed upon it at the start of a conditioning or practice period.

Best Practices:

- Training sessions should be introduced intentionally, gradually, and progressively
- Athletes should avoid additional volunteer sessions (7-on-7 drills, etc.)
- Collegiate athletes are especially vulnerable to exertional injuries during the first four days of transition periods. For example, hold only one training and conditioning session per day rather than 2 or more.
- Exercise should never be used as punishment and elevates risk above any reasonable performance reward

## Conclusion:

**All training sessions should be pre-planned and documented to align with the above recommendations.**

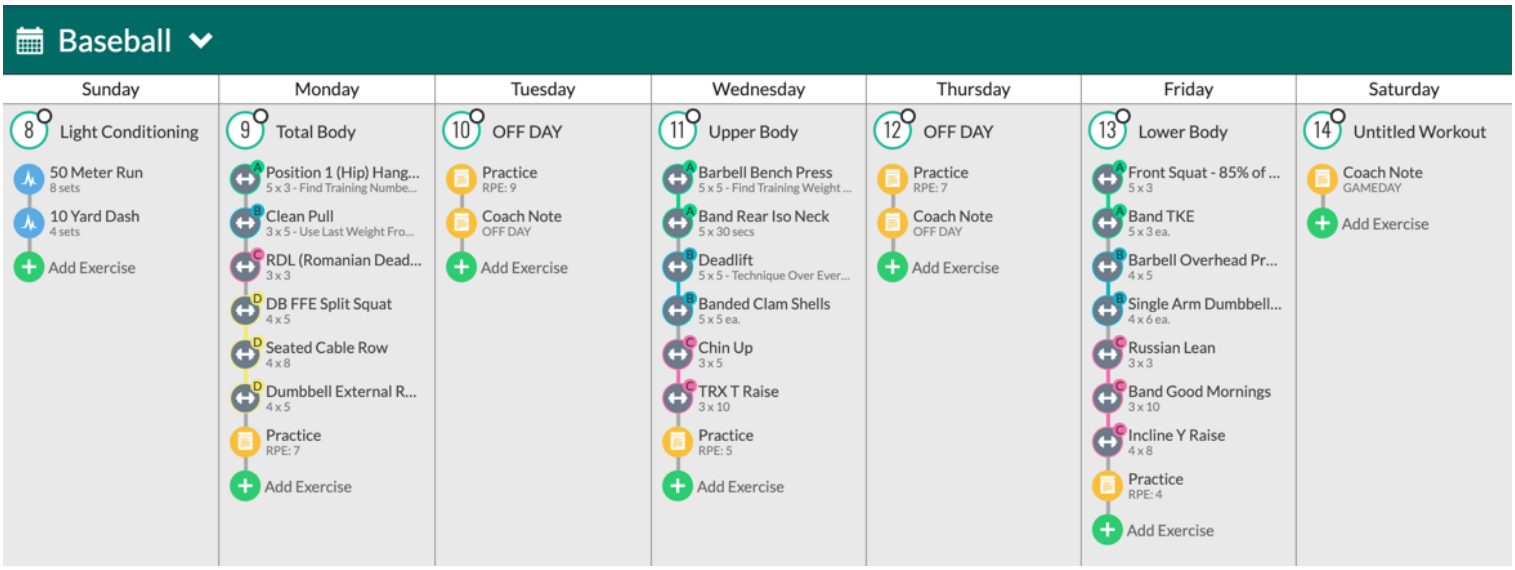
According to Cory Walts, Director of Performance at University of Pennsylvania,

> ***Doing what is best for the student-athlete requires a thoroughly planned training program that is built upon both research and experience, and is adaptable in real-time. Collaboration between the Strength and Conditioning coach, sport coach, and sports medicine professional will only enhance this program. Once an agreed upon program is created, it should be documented and accessible for all, including student-athletes and administration. This will hold all parties accountable and enable proper review after-the-fact.***

TeamBuildr allows strength and conditioning coaches, athletic trainers and other athletic healthcare associations to pre-plan and view training sessions before they occur and can decrease the likelihood that the coaches will go “off-script” during the session. Additionally, TeamBuildr has the ability to document calculate exercise intensity (Eg: total number of reps, % intensity, overall load) which delivers a quantitative measure to the intensity of each training session.

**Because of the collaborative process that takes place on TeamBuildr, training programs written on the software can act as the official record of reference. This will provide an objective source for the prescribed training program when an incident occurs such as exercise as punishment.**

Exercise should never be used as punishment and elevates risk above any reasonable performance reward. Many of these punitive exercises are unplanned and spontaneous; common sense should prevail. However, in the case where exercise is used as punishment TeamBuildr can either record the exercise while taking into account other training activity, or it can be the source of approved programming in the case where exercise as punishment was prescribed outside of the approved training.




TeamBuildr can also help monitor the workload of athletes, especially during transition periods and for those coming off of a hiatus or extended sedentary period. Sports medicine staff and other medical personnel can make modifications to the workout or to an individual athlete's workout if they have an injury that does not allow them to complete it as prescribed. Rather than relying on the strength coach or sending the strength coach an email, sports medicine professionals can make the change immediately or at minimum halt an athlete's prescribed training.

Traditionally, performance coaches are given a list of athletes' injuries and the restrictions for their training regimen. TeamBuildr will make this easier on both the strength/conditioning and sports medicine staff; trying to remember each athlete's injury and modifications can be stressful on the strength staff and sometimes even forgotten, thus increasing the chance of re-injury.

# Coach Certification and Qualified Personnel

NCAA bylaws require in all 3 divisions that strength and conditioning professionals are certified from a nationally accredited or recognized program. Sports medicine staff must be present during voluntary, off-season conditioning sessions and are allowed to modify or cancel any workouts for health or safety reasons.

However, in Division III dedicated strength coaches may be less prevalent, and as a result, sport coaches may need to provide strength and conditioning services. Any sports coach can conduct an in-season workout without needing a certification, but only certified coaches may conduct voluntary workouts in the off-season and only during the regular academic year and if the voluntary workouts are being conducted for all collegiate athletes.

This anticipates if the sport coach is serving a broader, campus-wide responsibility as a strength coach beyond just the sport that they are coaching.

Best Practices:

- Beyond just strength and conditioning professionals, each institution should adopt requirements for education for all athletics personnel (coaches, athletic trainers, etc.).
- Programs should focus on prevention of catastrophic injury and sudden death in sport and provide education specifically to injury prevention and load management.
- Regular education will not only improve the recognition and response skills of those who are involved in a catastrophic event, but can also contribute to a heightened state of organizational mindfulness and emergency readiness.

## Conclusion:

**Coaches should first and foremost seek accredited certifications in strength and conditioning, however, all coaches should participate in injury prevention and load management education programming.**

In TeamBuildr's strength and conditioning programming portal, we allow for direct access to resources such as articles, PDF's and other educational resources that can be installed by the athletic program to act as a direct resource in the same portal where coaches write training programs. Resources can include volume load charts recommending certain workload based on practice intensity, proximity to past training, practice or competition and overall guidelines to prescribing volume and intensity within the overall context of collegiate athletics.

Additionally, resources can be shared on TeamBuildr directly to specific coaches and athletes via an online-accessible Documents section, similar to Google Drive and Dropbox

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# Conclusion

Utilizing TeamBuildr will ensure  accurate monitoring of athlete prescribed and performed workloads, especially during transition periods and for those coming off of a hiatus or extended sedentary period. Sports medicine staff can be made aware of workouts and conditioning sessions and are able to view and approve  programming before they are prescribed ensuring a system that complies with NCAA guidelines and protects against liability.