

Playing Hurt vs. Playing Injured?

Is there a difference with being Hurt vs. being Injured?

It is very important for athletes to learn the difference between being hurt and being injured. Athletes must recognize just how much pain their bodies can take, and is the pain caused from just a muscle ache or a muscle tear? I have seen players use minor injuries as an excuse to get out of running, and seen many players play through the pain. Athletes want to be in the game, and it's very hard to just sit on the sidelines and watch the game. But taking the chance with making the injury worse by trying to play is just plain reckless. Think about the fact that if you make the injury worse; you could be out for a longer period of time.

On the other hand, many athletes have learned how to play hurt. They fight through the pain, and don't miss games just because they are hurt. It really just depends on the individual. I coached players that played through being hurt and some that didn't play because they broke a fingernail (not really, but it sometimes felt like that was the case). It really just depends on the player and how dedicated they are to the team. I've also coached players in high school that played other sports, where basketball was not their main sport, and when they got hurt a little, they refused to play. Why? Because they were afraid they wouldn't be able to play their main sport at full capacity, so they would sit for the rest of the season or until they felt they were at 100%.

If you play High School basketball, then your school must have an athletic trainer that is in charge of player injuries. Our athletic trainer has the power to allow players to play or not play – even if there is a doctor's note clearing the player. I have seen some athletic trainers claim that a player was “crying wolf” and were not really injured or hurt (basically they felt the player was faking it), but the player sure acted like they were in a lot of pain. In any case like this, you have to side with the player. If the player is truly a team player, and they really love the sport, they really wouldn't be faking an injury – they would want to be in the game.

My daughter had a bone chip in her hand that hurt really bad. One doctor said that they could remove the bone chip, but she would be out for a while, while a different doctor said that removing the bone chip would not make a difference one way or the other. Since the doctors appeared to be slightly confusing with their answers – she immediately said “No way, I'll take my chances with the pain.” She did this mostly because she didn't want to let her team down, and being hurt wasn't going to keep her from helping the team succeed. The outcome was that her team went to the State Tournament for the first time ever in school history. Do you remember the game that Michael Jordan played in – where he had the Flu really bad, and could hardly stand up? He fought through it, scored 45 points, the Bulls won the game, but at the end of the game Jordan almost passed out. He actually had to be carried off the court by his teammates. He gained the respect of a lot of people that night. He knew that his teammates and the fans were counting on him; he just couldn't let them down. My daughter was really sick with the flu, appeared really weak, and still wanted to play in her game that night also – but we made her stay home and miss the game because we felt it was the right decision for our daughters health.

Being hurt and being Injured are two different things, but the bottom line is that an athlete must understand the differences. Can you play while being hurt and not make it worse? Should you sit out and wait until you are completely healed? In this day and age, with all the lawsuits and legal issues – many doctors will take the “safe” route and keep a player out for longer than is needed.

We had a player with an ankle injury where the mom took them to the emergency room, then to their regular doctor. The doctor had the player out for three weeks, but after one week the player was running and jumping around during practices. The player could not play until the doctor cleared them. The player eventually went back and got cleared a week early, but you get the point. That is why it's always best to see your athletic trainer first, let them evaluate you, and let them send you to the doctor if further evaluation is needed. If it's a serious injury, the athletic trainer is not going to allow you to play (there are liabilities here also).

Does your coach have experience with injuries?

Coaches are required to have the experience necessary to deal with injuries when they occur. As a parent you should feel safe that your child will be taken care of if an injury occurs. There is always an exception, and you really don't want it to be your child when it comes to that exception. I remember one of my daughters playing in her first high school game and spraining her ankle – it was plain as day, she was hurt. The coach took her out, no one really attended to her, and she just sat there in pain. My wife had to take her some ice (because not one of the three coaches sitting there bothered to do this). We walked over at half time and told the coach we are taking her to get this checked out, all we got was a weird “look” from the coach, but we took her anyway. It turned out to be a bad sprain; she was out for 2-3 weeks. I was pretty disgusted with the lack of concern (experience) shown by the coaches. It is the responsibility of any coach to understand how to handle player injuries – or at the very least have someone on their staff that knows how to deal with injuries. And most likely, there are more coaches that do understand injuries than there are that don't understand them (it is now becoming a requirement at the middle school and high school level to be first aid certified). If your child is playing rec basketball or AAU, don't assume that the coach knows anything about injuries until you do a little research first (just to be on the safe side of things).

No matter what the situation is, a parent should do whatever they feel is best for their child (you already know this). Whether you allow the athletic trainer to evaluate, or rush your child to the emergency room – that is your right. I have rushed my children to the emergency room many times if I felt that it was appropriate to do so.

Here is an interesting article that I found on the Internet...

[Playing Hurt vs. Playing Injured – CLICK HERE FOR ARTICLE!](#)

In Conclusion

The bottom line is that the older an athlete gets the more experience they are with knowing if they are hurt or if they are actually injured. Younger players sometimes cry every time they get hurt – so you should use caution when it comes to the younger players (they really could be hurt? or they are crying because they are just embarrassed – you never know?). It's ok to play hurt if there is no possibility of making things worse, and it's also ok to sit out games if you are really injured and need time to heal. That's just the way it is when you play sports, and injuries are something that every athlete will have to eventually deal with...