

Going to Bat for the Isotopes – Physicians Keep Baseball Team in the Game

by **Dwight W. Burney III, M.D.**
and **Mali R. Schantz-Feld**
QuestCorp Media



Between 1997 and 2001, injuries cost Major League Baseball teams more than \$1 billion, with shoulder and elbow injuries topping the list.

When New Mexico Orthopaedics physicians hear a sharp crack, they hope it's just the sound of the ball hitting the bat. As team physicians for the Albuquerque Isotopes, a AAA affiliate of the Florida Marlins, tending to injuries and physicals during the baseball season is their way of scoring a hit for their community.

The physicians work with the team, which played its first professional game in 2003, conducting regular physicals, attending every game, and remaining on-call during off-hours. If the team did not have access to local physicians, its injured players would have to fly to Florida to receive care.

Regular Physicals Keep Players Fit

Monitoring the condition of the players is just as important to maintaining a winning team as RBIs and strikeouts. In fact, the Pacific Coast League Network requires players on each of its member teams to undergo regular physical examinations. "Any time a player is signed up or is coming up from the lower levels, they need a physical," explains Isotopes Manager Dean Treanor.

"If they are released from another club before we sign a contract, they need physicals, and anyone leaving needs an exit physical." Before the season is over, every player and staff member is thoroughly examined, and the physicians at New Mexico Orthopaedics work as a team to provide that service. "They have to document every medical condition, everything from a head cold to broken bones and torn ligaments," says Treanor.

Immediate Care Makes a Difference

As the team competes at the new Isotopes Stadium, the Isotopes manager, trainer, and two coaches keep a close and constant eye on the players. "If anyone gets hurt or a medical situation arises, we need to know what's going on immediately," says Treanor. Having a fast and accurate medical assessment helps them decide whether a player can — or should — continue playing. "If an injury occurs the night before a game, we need to determine the player's availability for the next day," he adds.



Treanor says he appreciates the availability of the New Mexico Orthopaedics physicians. One regular on the field is Dwight W. Burney III, MD, an orthopaedic surgeon specializing in sports medicine, occupational orthopaedics, reconstructive and trauma surgery, and joint surgery. "Dr. Burney works with the team regularly," says Treanor. "He stops by our clubhouse almost every day to update me."

Treating Common Baseball Injuries

Baseball players know many stretching and warm-up techniques to help prevent overuse injuries and develop flexibility, endurance, and strength. Despite the team's best efforts, however, injuries are almost inevitable.

Many baseball injuries result from players slamming into each other — injuring their hands, for example. Contusions can result when a baseball makes contact with any part of the player's body. Usually, the treatment for this type of minor injury involves ice packs and a few days of rest.

Stretched or torn ligaments can result from running bases or pivoting to make a play. For this, immediate treatment by a physician is imperative. A fracture often requires a cast, as well as a rehabilitation plan to restore strength to the injured area after healing. In this game, shoulders take a lot of abuse. As the most flexible joint in the body, the shoulder is capable of a wide range of motion.

However, on the baseball field, it is at high risk for overuse and is prone to tearing. Rotator cuff injuries are most commonly caused by repetitive strain on the shoulder, such as pitching. Physicians can treat this injury nonsurgically, depending on its severity.

Falling or forceful contact can result in a partially or fully dislocated shoulder. If a hard hit pulls the arm out of the shoulder socket, it will swell up, become numb, weaken, and bruise. A trained physician can pop it back into place and then follow up with orthopaedic care until it regains stability.

Catchers have their own specific problems. They are especially susceptible to arch pain and may need customized shoe inserts. Catchers also have a tendency to develop heel spurs, which are alleviated with proper warm-ups and supportive shoes.



In addition to the Isotopes, the New Mexico Orthopaedics physicians also work with the New Mexico Scorpions hockey team. Supporting community sports and keeping athletes healthy make the physicians at New Mexico Orthopaedics real “team players.”