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**AS USA WOMEN'S WORLD CUP SOCCER TEAM GOES FOR GOLD
THE NATIONAL ATHLETIC TRAINERS' ASSOCIATION OFFERS
SOCCER SAFETY TIPS TO ATHLETES OF ALL AGES**

DALLAS, July 14, 2011 – The USA Women's World Cup soccer team continues to dazzle fans across the country with its stunning victory against France and the highly anticipated gold medal game against Japan on Sunday. Since girls and women from five to 50, with their families and friends in tow, may be inspired to lace up their cleats and hit the field, the National Athletic Trainers' Association offers tips to enjoy the sport with safety first. "Soccer is a universal sport with great mental and physical benefits for recreational or elite athletes alike, says athletic trainer Ralph Reiff, ATC, MEd, director, St. Vincent Sports Performance in Indianapolis and former manager of athlete care for the 1996 Olympic Games. "It requires individual and team commitment and regardless of your technical or tactical skills or level can be enjoyed in enclosed or open fields throughout the year."

Reiff, whose practice has seen over 500 professional and Olympic athletes this year alone, offers some important tips to stay safe on the field and off the sidelines with injury. He always advises consulting a physician before starting a new activity:

- **Acclimatization:** It's important to start slowly to get into shape and play the sport, says Reiff. You don't want to go from sitting at home and watching TV to jumping on the field without proper preparation. There are also environmental considerations to consider. If you are not used to working out in the heat and sun, he advises that you start with short spurts of activity and then rest. Your body will adapt over a few days to length of play and weather conditions. This is about a seven to 10 day process. To help avoid the risk of heat illness, if you don't feel well, back off and seek help.

"Athletes in other sports admire soccer athletes because they recognize the tremendous fitness that is required," he says.

- **Proper warm ups and cool downs:** “My definition of warming up for soccer is to take your standard heart rate and increase it to a comfortable level,” says Reiff. Jumping, running at a good pace or doing a series of ground-based exercises that include pushups, sit ups and kicking the ball around are all good activities.

When your heart rate increases, stop and slow down and let your heart rate recover back to a level of readiness, he adds. This can vary depending on your initial level of fitness and activity. You can add light jogging, leg and arm swings at a moderate pace. You are essentially activating or “turning on” your muscles. At that point, you can get into the game so that the warm up and game time blend together.

Cool down prepares your body for the next activity. This sets the stage for how you are going to feel and perform tomorrow when you come back to the field or enjoy other physical activities. Cool down allows your muscles to calm down after being excited and activated. Your body, heart and muscles return to a steady and normal state of rest. Repeat some of the exercises you do in the warm up, suggests Reiff. The body will get into a pattern or rhythm of calming down. You feel better when at rest and not overly sore or at risk of injury by allowing yourself to slowly get to a steady state of rest.

- **Head smarts:** Abby Wambach may be making game winning headers but she’s developed experience and skill to do so, says Reiff. Headers are a standard play in soccer both defensively and offensively. There is a proper way to head the ball to lessen incident of an injury or concussion. Learning proper technique is vital. Seek the advice of a coach, athletic trainer or other sports or medical expert to master this skill.
- **Lower extremity expertise:** You can enjoy soccer and reduce the incidence of ACL, ankle or other lower extremity injuries through proper conditioning, agility exercises, increased core strength, improved posture and learning how to land appropriately. Girls are eight times more likely than boys to tear an ACL, according to the Center for Injury Research and Policy at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio.
- **Hydration and nutrition:** Fuel the body with the right type and correct portions of food and at the right time of day every day, advises Reiff. Hydration, he says, is the lubricant for the body and is what makes muscles work appropriately and allows the body to cool itself and maintain temperature control. “Most athletes come to practices or games improperly hydrated,” comments Reiff. If you think you’re drinking enough you may not be. A good rule of thumb is to check your urine color. Lemonade color is good; apple juice color means you are dehydrated. Start with 12 ounces of water each morning.
- **Sleep and rest:** Sleep is vital for muscle recovery and future activity; we all need to make sure to get enough of it to improve overall body functions and for mental health and stress reduction. Make proper sleep part of your plan. Take rest breaks during the day and during activity to allow the body to recover after an exercise activity. Listen to your body. If you are winded and tired, take a break. If you feel a pull, strain or injury, seek professional help.

“Finding balance in any sport is critical to success,” says Reiff. The World Cup elevates the game of soccer at this time of year. Though we all can’t be elite athletes on the universal stage, people of all ages and walks of life should be able to enjoy the game, to leave wanting to return tomorrow and to know this sport in particular can provide a lifetime of activity, movement and fun.”

National Athletic Trainers’ Association (NATA) – Health Care for Life & Sport

Athletic trainers are health care professionals who specialize in the prevention, diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation of injuries and sport-related illnesses. They prevent and treat chronic musculoskeletal injuries from sports, physical and occupational activity, and provide immediate care for acute injuries.

Athletic trainers offer a continuum of care that is unparalleled in health care. The National Athletic Trainers’ Association represents and supports 34,000 members of the athletic training profession. Visit

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