

Inside the Military Setting

A Firsthand Look at Athletic Training for the Marine Corps

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The Marine Corps' Sports Medicine and Injury Prevention (SMIP) program started in 2003. The mission of the SMIP athletic trainer is to reduce injury attrition by prevention. Currently 27 athletic trainers work within the SMIP at entry-level training sites around the nation. I am the only athletic trainer at Officer Candidates School (OCS) and have been performing this job since 2004.

Established in 1917, U.S. Marine Base Quantico, Va., the Crossroads of Marine Corps, serves as the place where "vital concepts, training, and equipment of the future are developed." OCS resides in a small corner of this base and is the only Marine Corps facility in the nation serving as the proving ground for future Marine officers. The mission of OCS is to "train, evaluate, and screen officer candidates to ensure they possess the moral, intellectual and physical qualities for commission; and the leadership potential to serve successfully as company grade officers in the operating forces." Potential officer candidates are vetted through a highly competitive recruiting process. The officer candidates are graded on 25 percent physical fitness, 25 percent academic, and

50 percent leadership. You pass the standards or you go home – period!

GETTING THE JOB

Prior to changing job settings, I was an assistant AT at George Mason University from 1997-2004. I would not have said this at the beginning of my collegiate career, but my years working track and field prepared me for a lot of the injuries that occur at OCS. Overuse types of injuries are always within the top three at OCS because the volume of running is similar to how a distance runner trains. Add to that lack of sleep, poor nutrition, no stretching, no recovery periods, a lot of Marine motivation and one can understand why overuse injuries occur.

Athletic training students, staff and even the officer candidates are constantly asking me how I came to be at OCS. I remember it like it was yesterday! I was looking at the Placement Vacancy Notices on the NATA Career Center and read a company heading named "CRAssociates." I was going to skip it, but curiosity got the best of me. I read the company's name again and panned to the right side of the screen and read "Quantico, Va." Being a Navy brat, I knew Quantico was a Marine base. I sent in a resumé, not knowing that a former George Mason general practice doctor was on the search committee for the position. Not only was this physician just recently promoted to a Navy Captain, he was also the Senior Medical Officer of the clinic with which I would work closely.

My resumé included recommendations from an Army physician and a Navy physician. My third recommendation was from the GMU Team Physician, who was prior Navy. I accepted the position over the phone while at an NCAA Division I track and field meet in Austin, TX. I didn't know it at the time, but the SMIP program was in a pilot-program stage. I took a leap of faith when I started this job in July 2004.

JOB STRUCTURE

The first five years of my job was a contracted position for two different companies. In 2010, my position was converted to government service or federal worker. One of the biggest differences I noticed about being a federal worker versus a collegiate athletic trainer was having a pay scale. The workers' position descriptions dictate the pay scale. The pay scale allows me to look into my potential earnings as I move forward in my career, something that was missing as an AT at the collegiate level.

Yearly, we evaluate ourselves and submit performance reviews. For hard work, we are sometimes awarded cash or time off through the Performance Award Review Board (PARB). Cash awards are dependent on the military budget. The advantages of working for the federal government are many, but there are also some negatives. For example, this year we are currently subjected to sequestration. The majority of Department of Defense workers will be taking one day off without pay

per week until the end of the fiscal year for a total of 11 days.

The 27 ATs within the program probably do things a little differently at each entry-level training site. I believe we fill the medical gaps within each of our commands. The Navy provides all medical services for the Marine Corps. The Army and Air Force have their own medical personnel. ATs are not here to replace Navy Medicine; we are here to add sports medicine to sites that may not have trained personnel. I am fortunate that the brunt of medical care at OCS is handled by the Naval Health Clinic. This allows me to concentrate on the prevention piece of my job. If I do my job well, Navy Medicine should see fewer injuries.

HIERARCHY

My position has two bosses. I answer to the Senior Medical Officer of the Navy clinic for anything that is associated with medical care for officer candidates and staff. I report to the Commanding Officer (CO) of OCS to provide him information to aid him in making informed decisions regarding training. I am considered a subject matter expert. If any training is causing an increase in injuries, it is my job to provide the CO different courses of actions to mitigate the problem.

The hierarchy of OCS is very similar to the college athletic world. The athletic director would be the commanding officer. The CO has an administrative staff, maintenance and transportation, public relations, supply and operations similar to what an athletic director would have working for him. Teams consist of various officer candidate classes throughout the year. Each company has staff members who act like coaches during physical training. The strength and conditioning coach in athletics is a Physical Training Instructor at OCS. The British Royal Marine Commandos have been providing us a Physical Training Instructor (PTI) for a number of years. The US Marine Corps does not have a specific job for physical fitness, but the commandos do. These British PTIs have a strong background in physical training through course work and national certifications in fitness similar to a Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist. The course work seems to be equivalent to an

exercise science degree combined with a degree in physical education. Just like in the athletic world, we work together to provide the best training environment for our Officer Candidates.

A TYPICAL DAY

A typical day for me starts at 0500 in the morning, which means I am up at 0350 and on the road by 0430. I arrive at the Satellite Athletic Training Room (SATR) located within the candidates' barracks. This room is designed to be mobile, comprised mainly of supplies and taping/treatment tables.

Every officer candidate that has stood in front of me has the willingness to volunteer, knowing that they will be in harm's way in less than a year. The spirit of patriotism flows through every one of these kids.

If the command needs the space, all the equipment within the room can be moved quickly and easily. I usually spend about 30 minutes or an hour here every morning, six days a week. This time is equivalent to the 30 minutes before practice starts when your student-athletes are running late and you have to get them out and ready!

The Corpsman screens them at 0430, and they decide whether the candidates are coming to me or going to medical.

Those who need quick medical evaluations or are in need of taping and feel that they can make training will come to me for further screening. The officer candidates who cannot make training due to injury go directly to the clinic.

After performing the duties at the SATR, I arrive at my main Athletic Training Room (ATR) in Branch Hall, which is a building named after the first African-American Marine Officer who served in World War II and the Korean War. The ATR contains all of the equipment typically found in any small ATR in the country. I generally will see if the clinic needs any help or go to the field.

If I go to the clinic, I evaluate and treat officer candidates. Now, since injury rates are low, the volume of candidates is easily handled by the clinic and most of the time I am not needed. Out in the field, I perform the duties of a typical athletic trainer in the traditional sense. I assist in preparing the officer candidate for transport when needed. The difference is Navy Corpsmen and Marines in tactical vehicles transport injuries off the field. The rest of the day is filled with taking care of staff members, entering data, attending meetings and preparing for future classes. The manpower hours to make this place run smoothly is incredible. I am involved in anything that relates to candidate training, especially sports medicine.

One thing I don't miss from the collegiate level is preparing water before practice! Here at OCS, Marines truck around watering bowls. I brief them on proper hydration during the first week of training, but the candidates are in charge of refilling their hydration systems and canteens. Mixable products, such as sports drinks, are done by them at night in the squad bays.

Every officer candidate that has stood in front of me has the willingness to volunteer, knowing that they will be in harm's way in less than a year. The spirit of patriotism flows through every one of these kids. I used to get paid to help that athlete win. Now, I help my officer candidates fulfill their goal in life – to see whether they are fit to lead Marines!

To learn more about opportunities for ATs in the emerging settings, visit the CEPAT page at <http://www.nata.org/CEPAT>. §