Day in the Life: Allen Americans

We visited the Allen Americans of the Central Hockey League on Feb. 3 to see what a normal game day is like for team’s athletic trainer, Jason Wallace, MS, ATC.

To watch a short documentary of the day we spent with the Allen Americans, visit our video channel at www.youtube.com/1930386.

Text & Images Jordan Grantham

8 a.m. Wallace arrives to the athletic training room and immediately starts filling the hot and cold whirlpool tubs. Soon, players are arriving and starting to soak their sore muscles in the tubs before a 10 a.m. morning skate.

The team is more than halfway through the 66-game season, and they are relatively healthy. Aside from one fractured thumb, a concussion and a torn ACL, the team is in good shape. Wallace works cooperatively with the team physician, chiropractor, massage therapist and nutritionist to ensure the team gets full medical care.

Wallace is hired through OrthoTexas and team physician Michael Schwartz, MD, MBA. In the hockey offseason, he works at the OrthoTexas clinic.

9 a.m. Just outside the athletic training room, the players are gathering in the lounge area, drinking coffee and watching hockey highlights on TV. A few players are receiving treatment from Wallace before the first action on ice for the day.

"On game day, I let the players do their thing," Wallace says. "They have their routines they like to follow."

9:15 a.m. One of the team’s goalies traveled to Oklahoma City the night before to play one game for the San Antonio Rampage of the American Hockey League, and he made the late-night drive back to Allen so he could play for the Americans that evening. He’s sore, so Wallace works to stretch out his muscles.

Hip problems are just one of the issues that Wallace sees on a daily basis with the hockey players. The nature of skating lends itself to groin and hip injuries in addition to the bruises and slashes common with hockey.

"The way they skate uses their glutes. When the glutes get tired, it transfers to their groins and hip flexors. I really focus on hips to prevent more injuries in that area," Wallace explains.

The Americans are allowed to carry 22 players, but they can only have 19 on the roster. Minor-league hockey has players straight from the junior level or those who have been sent down from the higher ranks of the sport. The Americans range from 21 to 31 years old, and ironically, most of the Allen Americans are from Canada.

Wallace has been with the Americans for two years, but this is his sixth season working in hockey. After serving in the Marines for four years, Wallace was watching the Los Angeles Kings play when an athletic trainer went on the ice to tend to an injured player. That scene
sparked Wallace’s interest in the profession, so he got his degree in athletic training from Eastern Michigan University. After graduating in 2005, he spent two years in Huntsville, Ala., working for the minor-league hockey and arena football teams. Wallace returned to Eastern Michigan to earn his Master’s degree and spent two years with the Flint Generals before joining the Americans. A lifelong hockey fan, Wallace says he “can’t imagine working any other sport.”

**9:45 a.m.** It’s a flurry of activity before the morning skate at 10 a.m. Wallace tapes one player’s groin and two sets of wrists.

**10 a.m.** The players are occupied with the pre-game skate, going through drills. One of the goalies takes a shot off the wrist, and comes to Wallace for evaluation. Wallace sits just outside the rink, ready to walk onto the ice in case of injury. Just before 11 a.m., Wallace heads back into the athletic training room to begin prepping for post-practice treatment. He knows the players will want to get into the whirlpool baths, so he immediately starts getting those to the proper hot and cold temperatures.

**11 a.m.** The morning skate is over, and players are filing into the athletic training room for ice baths, ice bags and other treatments. The goalie who took the puck off his wrist during practice has a small open wound that has to be cleaned and wrapped.

Another player has a swollen foot after blocking a shot with his skate earlier that week, so he receives an anti-inflammatory injection to help with the swelling.

**11:30 a.m.** Wallace wears many hats, including the one labeled “ticket distributor.” Players file in and out of the room, asking for game tickets for their family members. Wallace hands out tickets for the next two games. He explains that he also has to coordinate with the team’s booster club to help them plan and execute the events they put on for the players.

**Noon - 3 p.m.** Each game day features a decent break in the middle when Wallace and the players can get lunch, rest and take care of whatever they need to do. On this particular day, Wallace heads to Dallas with equipment manager Kacee Coberly for lunch with the Dallas Stars athletic trainers. He uses the rest of his down time to take care of paperwork and run errands.

**4 p.m.** Wallace begins prepping for the game that evening by reheating the whirlpool tubs and making drinks for the players with electrolytes. He reads medications for the players who always request them, ranging from ibuprofen to electrolyte pills and antacids. He makes return trips to the ice machine to get huge coolers of ice to dump into the ice baths.

Wallace has a high school sports medicine student who interns with him occasionally, and on this day he helps the student prepare the bench and locker room for the visiting team. The team needs drinks, towels, a ticket list and a food menu. Then Wallace runs to storage to pick up more bottled waters and sports drinks for the Americans.

**4:45 p.m.** The players begin arriving for the game, decked out in suits and ties. The first player hops into the hot tub, switching
6:25 p.m. The players head onto the ice for pregame skate and warm-ups. Wallace heads back to the athletic training room to evaluate two injured dancers who are part of the team’s Ice Angels.

Dr. Schwarz has arrived for the game. He helps Wallace evaluate the dancers’ injuries. One has shin splints and the other is having problems with her hip. Wallace and Schwarz show one dancer how to stretch to help her shin splints and discuss orthotics after looking at the shape of her arch. The hip injury is evaluated, and the dancer is given exercises and stretches to use to help ease the pain.

6:50 p.m. One player comes into the room asking for more antacids before the game starts, and then the entire team lines up in the concourse waiting to be announced.

7 p.m. The puck is dropped onto the ice for the faceoff, and the game begins. Wallace sits on the far end of the bench, watching the ice carefully for injuries. “The games are my favorite part,” Wallace says.

10 p.m. The game has ended, and the Americans hold on to win 3-2. The team is relatively unscathed injury-wise, but one player did suffer a sprained ankle that brought him to the athletic training room during third period. Wallace tends to him and helps the other players with their ice baths and small injuries.

After the games, he has to help clean the benches and bring all of the towels, tape, clipboards and ice bags back into the athletic training room.

11:30 p.m. The last player is gone, the athletic training room is clean and Wallace is ready to lock up.

It was a long day of work for Wallace, but he’ll be back at 8 a.m. the next day to do it all over again.