Results, straight from the heart

*Numerous Longwood athletic teams wear heart monitors to gather data*

*By Kurt Martin*

It is a trend that is sweeping the landscape in both college and professional athletics to better monitor the health and well-being of students both on and off the field, and it is the use of heart monitors before, during, and after athletic events.

Three different athletic programs here at Longwood currently use monitoring technologies from *FirstBeat,* to track different health statistics while the student-athlete is in action.

According to Director for Sports Medicine Carly Fullerton, the statistics include: TRIMP score, heart rates, workload amounts, and recovery loads amongst other stats.

Per Fullerton, a TRIMP score is on a scale of one to five and measures workload during a particular session.

Fullerton said, “If were looking at a late recovery day, their TRIMP score should be in the ones. If we are seeing that they are in the fours and fives then we know that they are not recovered from the day before, and we know they aren’t getting maybe the most sleep or things like that.”

“It gives you a ton of information when you look at it, and it takes a long time to sit and look. There are still things that I don’t understand and I’ve been looking at it for quite a few years now.”

According to Fullerton, the three teams that currently use the monitors here at Longwood are: Men’s Basketball, Field Hockey, and Women’s Soccer. The Men’s Soccer program used the monitors during the preseason practices that entailed heavy conditioning, but have since backed off on use.

For Men’s Basketball’s first-year head coach Griff Aldrich, reviewing the data received from the monitors on a daily basis has become a major priority.

Aldrich said, “It’s a tool to be able to evaluate the exertion level and the physical load level that each athlete is undergoing during an activity. It’s a great way for us to know where they are physically.”

“We like to be able to look at it during the actual practice, and the main benefits are number one: injury prevention, you can see ‘okay this athlete is overexerting and is at risk of an injury’, the second thing is you can help them evaluate how hard they are going. If your score is really low, you may feel like you’re going hard but you’re only at 60 percent of your overall heartrate when the average should be around 70 to 75.”

Women’s Soccer head coach and program founder Todd Dyer also uses the information from the heart monitors on a daily basis, because it adds an element of accountability to student athletes.

Dyer said,” They know that they are constantly being monitored, not that we want them working as hard as they can all the time. Really being able to track the amount of work our athletes were doing on heavy practices, light practices, games and all of those things.”

According to Dyer, the main reason the team uses the monitors is to measure the workload of the team.

Dyer said, “After you play a game, you have a recovery day and then you start to build up again, but you need to rest before the next game. Basically we are trying to find that ‘ideal training rhythm’ for our team to make sure that we are putting in the right amount of work on the right days, but then also allowing them to recover either after a match, or get their legs back before a match.”

According to Fullerton, the ability to purchase the monitors comes from each teams allotted budget, and is not mandatory for use, but she would like to see more teams use the monitors.

Fullerton said, “From a wellness stance and from a strength and conditioning stance it really works well for us to be able to see the information, and it’s nice for the coaches to be able to learn about it and see all the data points you can get from the machines every day.”

According to Fullerton, player’s reactions have been both positive and negative to the monitors.

Fullerton said, “The players, they like looking at the numbers and comparing them player to player because it is competition like ‘oh my number is better than yours’ and that kind of thing.”

“Especially for the male athlete the biggest complaint is the band and the way it sits and where it sits, for a girl it’s fine because it sits right under a sports bra band, so it doesn’t affect you. For guys they don’t have something holding it down, so you either have to make it tight enough where it will actually stay and sometimes it will rub, or it will start to slide as a player sweats.”

Each team that wears the monitors are in charge of keeping the bands properly sanitized.

Fullerton said, “It’s all on the coaches. Lysol wipes or Lysol spray is fine, something like that, that’s going to be an antibacterial. The bands are kept in this thing that rolls out and has little pockets for each one to go in, and so you slide them in, and they are numbered, you roll it up, then it clips and slides into a bag. If you don’t clean them everything just grows.”

According to Fullerton, the teams who wear the bands haven’t had any serious illnesses due to the bands, other than a few cases with a small rash as a player is getting adjusted to the band and monitor.

Athletes wear the heart monitors during lifting, practice, and in-game.