**[Opinion: Intense Football Mindset Needs to Change](http://www.athleticbusiness.com/athlete-safety/opinion-intense-football-mindset-needs-to-change.html)**

by Deron Snyder

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My youngest daughter has taken to watching "Friday Night Tykes," the reality TV show about ultra-competitive youth football programs in Texas. In the season premiere Tuesday night, a coach got in the face of a 12-year-old who struggled to keep up during wind sprints.

"You do this every damn day: 'I can't breathe ... I'm gonna have a heart attack,'" the coach mocked. "You ain't dead yet. Push through it!"

During another conditioning session, the adult gave the youngsters encouragement: "Throw up and keep going! Throw up and keep going!"

The modern football mindset is built on those primitive foundational principles. Construction begins at the peewee level. Players who continue through high school and onto college often are the toughest and hardest working. Some of them fear nothing except being called "soft."

But peers can apply the label whether you endure grueling drills or succumb.

That's what happened after three University of Oregon players were hospitalized late last week following a series of off season workouts. On Tuesday, new head coach Willie Taggart suspended Irele Oredinde - the strength and conditioning coach who followed him from South Florida - which led to criticism from players who didn't spend several days in the hospital.

"How do you suspend a man for three players being out of shape?" junior wide receiver Darren Carrington II tweeted. "All I can say is wow!"

Freshman linebacker Keith Sims' tweet demonstrated his mastery of Football Philosophy 101: "If you do not grind, you do not shine. #FreeCoachO." Sophomore safety Mattrell McGraw exhibited the proper perspective for a gladiator: "Don't believe we're working any harder than the other top elite programs," he tweeted. "Some people's bodies are just different. 3 out of 112 players. It's not 90 or 100. What about the 109 that's still working?!"

Yes, that's always the question regarding football.

A 14-year-old in Nevada was felled by heatstroke during a game and died in April. A 15-year-old in California collapsed near the end of a conditioning session and died in May. A 12-year-old in Georgia suffered heatstroke during practice and died in July.

But what about the million other boys who didn't die from football in 2016? Do the 12 high school players who suffered football-related deaths in 2015 outweigh the boys who participated and lived?

Nothing in reports by The Oregonian suggest that Doug Brenner, Sam Poutasi or Cam McCormick were near death when they reached the hospital. But Poutasi and McCormick remained hospitalized as of Tuesday evening; Brenner was released earlier that day.

Poutasi's mother told the newspaper that her son was diagnosed with rhabdomyolysis, a syndrome in which muscle tissue breaks down and leaks into the blood stream. Some Oregon players reportedly experienced discolored urine, a common symptom of the syndrome. Subsequent testing revealed some players had high levels of creatine kinase, another indicator.

It appears that Oredinde crossed the line in football conditioning, a point that might be undetectable without hindsight. However, it's closer to avoidable when better foresight is applied.

For Oredinde, that would've started with acknowledging the team's lapse in conditioning. Oregon's season ended without a bowl game, meaning players had been on their own for nearly a month. It's safe to assume that some were out of shape but they all wanted to impress the new coaching staff, especially since Taggart said poor physical fitness contributed to the program's slide.

Oredinde also would've done well to ensure he was up-to-speed on advancements and best practices in his field. No, he's not the first S&C coach whose charges were diagnosed with rhabdomyolysis; 13 Iowa players were hospitalized with the syndrome in 2011 after intense workouts on back-to-back days.

But it turns out that Oredinde isn't certified by the Collegiate Strength and Conditioning Coaches Association, which reportedly requires a very rigorous process.

Certification wouldn't guarantee a different outcome in this case. If so, there'd be no such thing as malpractice. Nonetheless, 13 years into his career as a collegiate S&C coach, Oredinde faces questions about his qualifications, questions that his bachelor's in recreation administration and master's in sport management can't answer.

In addition to issuing a one-month suspension without pay, Oregon announced it was modifying the offseason workout program and changing Oredinde's direct supervisor. Instead of falling under Taggart, the strength staff will report to Oregon's director of performance and sports science.

Those are good moves. But while we're here, why are college football players required to go through grueling workouts in early January anyway? Bear Bryant's romanticized, barbaric training sessions at Texas A&M are history, but the ethos isn't extinct.

"Strength and conditioning sessions have become fundamental to success in collegiate sports," said Douglas Casa of the National Athletic Trainers' Association when a task force studied the issue in 2012. "However, the athletes' development, health and safety are sometimes overshadowed by a culture that values making athletes tough, instilling discipline and focusing on success at all costs. This ill-conceived philosophy has been a contributor to the alarming increase in collegiate athlete deaths and serious injuries during conditioning sessions."

Adults in football must change their mindsets before youngsters can follow suit."You ain't dead yet" is hardly the standard we want to instill as the little tykes grow up.

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