

## Hendricks cares for Lassen and Lions

Written by Tom Fruehling

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Within seconds last Friday night after Linn-Mar basketball player Matt Lassen suffered a concussion when he cracked his head on the court, athletic trainer Jill Hendricks was down on the floor with him calling for an ambulance.

And when Marcus Paige sprained his All-American ankle the day before the season opener, it was Hendricks who decided whether he should play.

She stops bloody noses and tapes ankles, too. But her job involves a lot more.

"When people see me at games, they might just think I'm the water girl," Hendricks says. "That's hardly the case."

For starters, she has a bachelor's degree in exercise science from Central College in Pella with an emphasis on athletic training, as well as a master's from Drake in public administration.

While she works full-time (far more than 40 hours a week) year-round out of a well-equipped training room at Linn-Mar High School, she's actually employed by St. Luke's Hospital under contract with the Linn-Mar school district.

Being always on the sidelines at games "as crucial as that is in case of injury" is just one part of what she does.

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"I'm responsible for injury prevention and injury care for every Linn-Mar athlete, boys and girls, in every sport, from the high school, down to the middle schools," says Hendricks, 32, a 1997 graduate of South Tama High School. "If they get hurt, I work with them on physical therapy to get them back in competition as quickly and as safely as possible."

Not just the ones people pay to see play, either. She tends to members of the cheerleading and pompon squads, swimmers and golfers, soccer and tennis players. Even runners on the middle school cross country team.



"Regardless of grade level, talent or sport," says Hendricks, who is in her seventh year at Linn-Mar, "I treat everybody exactly the same."

She's not alone, of course. The other Metro high schools (and most smaller schools as well) have staff trainers or have contracts for services. At Prairie High School, for instance, where basketball player Jacob Aune also suffered a concussion last Friday night, the school uses Performance Health and Fitness of Coralville for training purposes and has on-site trainers at games.

They, too, responded immediately and called for paramedics when Aune got hurt. The same ambulance crew that transported Aune to Mercy Hospital drove Lassen to St. Luke's just an hour earlier.

In such critical situations, Hendricks says teamwork comes into play. While physicians are in attendance at all varsity football games, she is the first certified medical responder in case of injury at most athletic events.

It's up to her to provide an instant diagnosis and plan of action. She is at every varsity practice and home game, attends as many on the road as possible and is always on call.

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"My cell phone's never off," she says.

As was the case last week, her care doesn't end when emergency personnel arrive on the scene. She followed Lassen to the hospital and then to Iowa City when he was transferred to University Hospitals and Clinics.

Every day since, Hendricks has visited Lassen, who was allowed to leave the intensive care unit on Monday and reportedly making good progress at the UI hospital from his head injury.

"I know Matt's parents can't say enough about what Jill has meant to them and to Matt," says Linn-Mar basketball coach Chris Robertson. "We're awfully fortunate to have her. She's a real professional.

"It was pretty scary last week, but she was calm the whole time. She handled it perfectly. Jill always puts the kids' interests first."

For someone who first became interested in a career as an athletic trainer as a freshman in high school, Hendricks says the real rewards of the job come from relationships she develops with the athletes.

She begins rehabilitation sessions for as many as 20 students early in the morning and continues working right until they turn off the gym or field lights at night.

"I think you have to have a passion for sports to do this," she says. "But what I really enjoy is being around these kids. I see some of them three hours a day.

"And I keep in contact with a lot of them, even after they leave Linn-Mar. I just talked to Kiah (Stokes) last night, for example."

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She also says she has the full support and respect from the school administration and coaches.

"When it comes to the kids' health and safety, whatever I say goes," says Hendricks. "I feel I play a vital role. And I really think of myself as being part of the team in whatever the sport."