

Bandits help doctors learn about arm injuries

Steve Batterson | The Quad-City Times | Posted: Sunday, July 5, 2009 | 5:40 pm

Fans settling into their seats for Friday's Quad-Cities River Bandits game weren't the only people talking baseball at Modern Woodmen Park.

As players warmed up, a group of Quad-City area physicians attended a Continuing Medical Education event hosted by Genesis Health System in which throwing and arm injuries were the topic of discussion.

The session was designed for family-practice doctors who are on the frontlines when parents bring injured youngsters in for treatment, said Dr. Jessica Ellis, a specialist in sports injuries for Orthopaedics and Rheumatology Associates who conducted the session.

"If a young baseball player is experiencing pain when they throw, they may not necessarily be injured but it may be a situation worth looking into," Ellis said. "Parents and coaches need to be proactive, especially the younger the player."

River Bandits pitcher Dave Carpenter participated in the session, demonstrating throwing motions used by athletes.

A participant in a case study on arm strength when he was a college student at West Virginia, Carpenter found the topics discussed to be relevant.

"You see a lot of young kids out there trying to throw a Josh Beckett or Tim Lincecum breaking ball at an age where they have no business attempting that," said Carpenter, who studied kinesiology in college.

"There are a lot of sad stories out there about young kids who have wrecked their arms. Young players need to pay attention to their bodies and be smart as they develop skills and train."

Ellis said she regularly sees young pitchers who have injured themselves by attempting to throw pitches their bodies are not ready to handle.

"Individuals have different growth patterns and by trying to do too much too soon, bone injuries can be a consequence," Ellis said. "Something that might lead to tendonitis in older folks might actually be a bone injury in a young person."

The medical and safety advisory committee of USA Baseball completed a study of youth pitching injuries in November, 2008, and its report, available at Web site usabaseball.com, includes a series of recommendations designed to assist in the healthy development of young pitchers.

The report suggests pitch limits based on a player's age and recommends that young pitchers do not attempt to throw breaking pitches until their bones have matured, something that can be indicated by puberty.

"The guidelines there are good, and they make a lot of sense. I think people also need to be careful with the number of leagues that their youngsters are pitching in," Ellis said.

"I've seen situations where a player will go from a little league team in the summer to a traveling team at other times in the year. It might be a benefit for a pitcher on a little league team to play a different position on a traveling team and not risk over-extending an arm."

She said studies of young pitchers from sunbelt states where baseball is played throughout the year have indicated an increased risk of throwing and arm injuries.

"The hope is that through education, young pitchers can safely and smartly develop their skills," Ellis said.

About 30 people attended Ellis' session on the suite level at the stadium, gaining an understanding of the diagnosis and prevention of arm and throwing injuries. She said the ballpark provided a perfect setting for physicians to learn.

"It's a good opportunity for them to gain some understanding and then have an enjoyable evening out with their families watching a ballgame and fireworks," Ellis said.