Managing Heel Pain in Youth Players

One of the most common problems among early adolescent players, those between the ages of 11-14, is heel pain. Not to worry. Heel pain is a very common complaint among players who are entering puberty and the predictable growth spurt that accompanies it. It is more common in boys, and may affect one of both heels. Pain is more acute during seasonal play, and is exacerbated by wearing poorly padded cleated shoes. Experience has shown also that players may have to manage their pain for more than one season.

Heel pain is this population is usually short-lived, and is easily managed over time. I strongly recommend moist heat prior to any practice or game, and ice IMMEDIATELY following a practice or game for 12-15 minutes. This should become a part of the player's routine. One more recommendation—*Tuli's* heel cups. They can usually be purchased in local sporting goods stores. They should be worn in the player's shoes for as long as pain persists. Players may also want to consider wearing them in all shoes during the season.

One last thought—I am a strong believer in the common sense approach to pain management: IF IT HURTS TOO MUCH TO PLAY, THEN DON'T PLAY. In the case of heel pain, parents are reminded that pain tolerance is based on both physiological and psychological variables, and no two athletes will respond exactly the same. Therefore, the best person to determine playability is the athlete himself. Besides, trying to convince a competitive athlete not to play with pain is much easier said than done—as many parents have already learned!