

The Promise of Athletic Prowess

Clarence Shields Jr., MD, founded Team HEAL to mend the injuries of disadvantaged student athletes so they can follow their dreams.

When Marquis Curtis, a 17-year-old junior at Crenshaw High School, broke his left femur this past year, he never thought he'd play football again. But with the help of his athletic trainer through a Los Angeles-based non-profit organization called Team HEAL, Curtis may not only play his senior year, but advance to a successful college career.

Team HEAL stands for "Helping Enrich Athletes Lives." It was founded in 1994 by Clarence Shields Jr., MD, an orthopedic surgeon at Kerlan-Jobe Orthopaedic Clinic in Los Angeles, to provide world-class medical care, injury prevention services, fitness instruction and nutrition education to student athletes. He started the program after noticing the financially bleak sports budgets of inner-city high schools. Team HEAL is active at Crenshaw, Dorsey, Banning, Manual Arts and Carson High Schools.

"Thanks to Team HEAL, my left leg is a lot stronger now," Curtis says. "After I hurt my leg, I had to get surgery and take two weeks off. When I came back to school, my trainer helped me right away through stretching, running and weightlifting. Hopefully I will be able to play next season. Right now, things are looking good."

When the NFL Rams still played in Los Angeles, Dr. Shields was the team doctor. So he's been practicing sports medicine at the highest level. "During my whole career, a lot of inner-city sport coaches would bring me one child a year that hurt their knee or their shoulder," Dr. Shields says. "They would say 'Doctor, can you fix him or her because the family can't afford it. But he or she is a good kid and wants to go to college.' So every year I would help out one or two children. When the Rams left town, I had more free time. I said, 'Why don't I try to do this for more than one child?' That was the genesis of Team HEAL."

Team HEAL provides full-time athletic trainers at each school, training rooms with high-quality equipment, physical conditioning and rehabilitative therapy, and pre-season sports physicals by volunteer physicians. In addition, Team HEAL offers physician staffing at home games and

tutoring services to assist athletes with academic priorities.

The program targets high school football teams specifically because that sport results in the most injuries. Most injuries seen by Team HEAL involve the knee, shoulder and ankle.

"When these kids get hurt, it can be the



> Former NFL Rams team doctor, Clarence Shields Jr., MD, founded Team HEAL to provide inner-city high school athletes with world-class athletic training and sports medicine.



> Dr. Shields provides medical care at home games for inner-city high school football teams that work with Team HEAL.



> Dr. Shields treats Marcus Turner, a Crenshaw High School athlete.

end of their dreams," Dr. Shields says. "They may turn to opposite things, instead of good things because that is all they are exposed to. A lot of times the ticket to their future involves their physical and athletic skills. When those get damaged, they can't move to the next level, and that is a crisis for them."

When Dr. Shields can repair a student's injury, he knows he is making a difference. "I remember helping a female who was an all-star in basketball at Crenshaw," Dr. Shields says. "In her sophomore year, she tore the main ligament that you need in cutting and jumping sports, which impaired her knee. She went through the LA County health system her entire 11th grade year, trying to fix her knee. She never really had a diagnosis established and nothing was done. I started treating her during her senior year at the start of the basketball season. So we got a brace for her and we got her through the basketball season. At the end of the season, we actually fixed

her knee. She went on to receive a college scholarship. Two years later, when she was in college, she hurt her other knee. So she came back and said, 'I want you to fix my other knee. This time I can pay you because I have medical insurance.'

"That was a monumental experience for me," Dr. Shields says. "When something like that happens, it charges my battery again. It is a sign from God reminding me why I must continue to do this."

Since 1994, Team HEAL has touched the lives of more than 10,000 high school student athletes a year. Today, the program continues to expand by adding one high school every two years. Team HEAL is financially supported by Kerlan-Jobe Orthopaedic Clinic and Health South Sports Medicine and Rehabilitation Center, both nationally recognized sports medicine facilities in Los Angeles.

In addition to his role with Team HEAL, Dr. Shields is active in organized medicine and at his alma mater, Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. He is a past president and board member of the American Orthopaedic Society of Sports Medicine and a member of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons and the Los Angeles County Medical Association. He is also on the board of trustees for Loyola Marymount, where he helped start an athletic training program for college athletes.

Humble about his contributions, Dr. Shields says community activities are a natural progression for physicians. "We are in a people-enrichment business; that's what we do for our whole career. So it is not anything unusual for you to volunteer your services to help someone."

When Curtis got hurt, his future started to look grim. An avid player of both football and baseball, Curtis always dreamed of a college football career at either Oregon State University or Colorado State University. He wants to play quarterback or slot receiver for a university, and then play professionally.

Dr. Shields' Team HEAL is making that dream possible for Curtis. And it has made dreams possible for thousands of other student athletes like him. —Dina L. Bunwell