

Smart Start

Sports medicine legend Dr. Lawrence Lemak kicks off a new orthopedic center with the SMART Institute—an acronym for Sports Medicine Related Trauma—at Brookwood Medical Center.

By Jan Walsh

World-renowned sports medicine and orthopaedic surgeon Dr. Lawrence Lemak is renewing his vision of athlete and patient care at Lemak Sports Medicine at Brookwood Medical Center. A leader in sports medicine and arthroscopy research, Lemak was a founder and board member of the American Sports Medicine Institute. He was also a founding partner of Alabama Sports Medicine and Orthopaedic Center, which was founded in 1986 and became one of the nation's leading orthopaedic clinics until 2007, when the center was dissolved. Lemak also revolutionized sports safety and prevention both on and off the field by helping standardize treatment for professional and college athletes, educating coaches and researching injuries.

Lemak's skills, talent and experience as an orthopaedic surgeon along with his entrepreneurial spirit and ingenuity led him to Brookwood. And here he plans to build a comprehensive regional center for the care of athletes and others who have similar injuries or problems as athletes. Through a joint venture of Lemak Sports Medicine, Brookwood Medical Center and Champion Sports Medicine—as the rehabilitation provider—Lemak continues his commitment to sports safety and prevention. Also practicing in Lemak Sports Medicine is his son David and former fellow, Bobby Agee, and three fellows, who are in specialty training under him. “The reason for the move is that Brookwood has tremendous facilities and personnel resources and is willing to devote these resources for the orthopaedics and sports medicine center,” Lemak says. “They also have the largest number of orthopaedic

surgeons and staff in the area, with 59 surgeons and 39 active staff. In addition, they have a well-focused multi specialty staff of doctors whose expertise is often needed for athletes who have other injuries and illnesses, such as a concussion or cardiac problems as well as an orthopaedic injury.”

At Brookwood Lemak will build The SMART Institute—an acronym for Sports Medicine and Athletic Related Trauma. The SMART program will be a collaboration with other sub specialists at Brookwood providing preventive education and treatment of injuries for athletes. The program will reach high school and recreational athletes and their coaches who may not have the same access to information and services as college and professional athletes. Lemak and his son, David, will remain as team physicians for 18 high schools, Auburn University, Samford University, Miles College, Alabama State University and the University of Montevallo. Lemak will also continue as the medical director for several professional sports.

SMART includes the involvement of high school and college athletic trainers, who help care for athletes. It offers pre-participation physicals for athletes involving all specialties. The coaches and athletes will receive SMART priority cards for immediate access in the office, emergency room and Friday Night Clinics. There will be availability of other subspecialties, such as cardiologists, neurosurgeons, ophthalmologists, plastic surgeons and neurologists, to address other problems that often happen to athletes. “Many times an injury is not limited to orthopedics such as concussion or facial injuries,” Lemak

explains.

Critical to the SMART Program is an educational component that includes the development of an emergency action plan. “Coaches must have a plan of what you will do if the catastrophic happens on the playing field because it does happen. Kids die on the field, and most of these can be prevented,” Lemak says. “This educational component includes seminars for coaches on catastrophic injuries of the spine, brain and heat-related illnesses.” The SMART Institute will also teach PREPARE, a program established by the National Council for Sports Safety, which Lemak founded in 2001. The two-hour course is taught online to coaches of youth, recreation and high school. It teaches how to prevent injuries and illnesses and what to do until professional help arrives.

Other components of the program being developed will include injury surveillance, a women's injury preventative plan and a grass roots community prevention plan. “We already have in place a soccer injury surveillance plan, modeled after what we developed for Major League Soccer, and a football injury data collection plan similar to what we have used with NFL Europe for the past few years. The Women's Medical Center is a good fit because women in soccer and basketball are at high risk to ACL [anterior cruciate ligament] injury,” Lemak says. The grass roots community program is being spearheaded by Barry Faulkner, who is piloting the safety program with Oak Mountain's youth coaches and safety administrators to make sports safer for youth and recreation athletes.

“This comprehensive program allows me to continue caring for athletes at the highest level. It allows me to serve patients who have the same injuries or medical problems as athletes with the same resources,” he says. “I am fortunate that Brookwood has the abilities and dedication to help me carry out this vision.”