



Edison trainer, coaches - and maybe a law - saved Colonia basketball player's life

January 16, 2016, by Jim Lambert

Tim Root was sitting at an Edison boys freshman basketball game on Tuesday afternoon in his usual spot - courtside, next to the Edison bench - when the highly unusual happened. A visiting player from Colonia collapsed mid-play on the court.

"The play was coming down toward me," said the 44-year-old Root, the head athletic trainer at Edison since 2003. "I noticed the young man seemed to fall into another player and just drop to the court."

Root and others immediately sprang into action, and it's no exaggeration in the calm aftermath to say they saved a life.

"Myself, our freshman coach (Chris Banos), and their freshman coach (Joseph LaSala) all ran to the player," said Root. "Everyone just went into action. He was still conscious, but in a somewhat seizure state, and their coach mentioned that maybe he had a health history, so I immediately called 911."

At that time Mark Blevins, a phys ed/health teacher and Edison's girls volleyball coach, quickly did his part.

Blevins, who was working the scoreboard clock, sped off to get an automated external defibrillator, or AED.

Under New Jersey's "Janet's Law," passed in 2012 and fully in effect since Sept. 1, 2014, all public and non-public schools are required to have an emergency action plan for sudden cardiac arrest, as well as an AED on-site for all athletic events.

According to "Janet's Law," an AED device must be within "reasonable proximity" of the athletic field or gym, a distance that typically means it can be retrieved and used within 90 seconds. The law is named for Janet Zilinski, an 11-year-old Warren Township girl who died of sudden cardiac arrest after cheerleading practice in 2006.

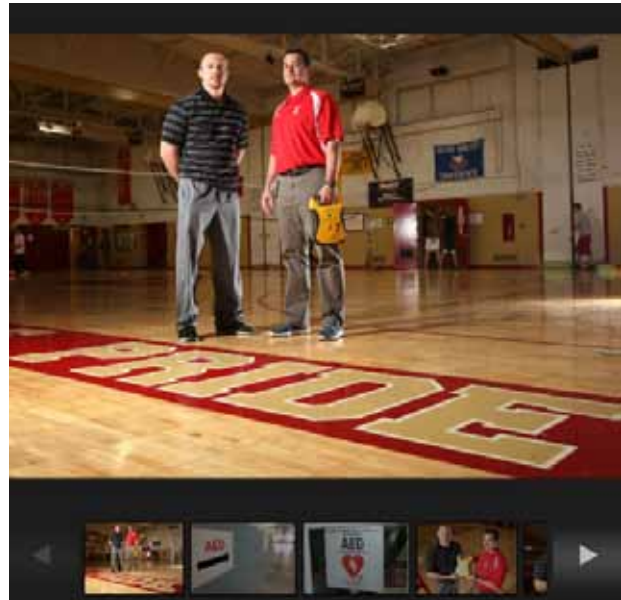
"At first I didn't know the severity of the situation, but seeing the freshman coach (LaSala) from Colonia react the way he did put a fire under my butt," said Blevins. "At some point I am pretty sure he was saying he wanted us to get (an AED) as soon as possible."

Blevins said it took him about 45 seconds to retrieve the AED, located in a nearby lobby just outside the gym, and get back to the athlete, whose name hasn't been released out of concern for the family.

"We had him hooked up to the AED, which evaluates the victim and advises actions (through voice commands) to get everyone clear," said Root. "It advised a shock, and that assumes he wasn't breathing," said Root.

Blevins said the AED didn't pick up a heart rhythm, which is why it advised a shock.

"If the AED doesn't pick up a heart rhythm it will advise a shock," said Blevins. "And that was the case. This particular type of AED was an automatic shocker, so no one had to press a button. It just did it. Then Tim started to do other things, like open up his airways so he could breathe more easily."



Edison High School health and physical education teacher Mark Blevins, left, and trainer Tim Root used an AED (automated external defibrillator) to save the life of a player from Colonia High School during a freshman basketball game. 1/6/16 Edison, NJ (John Munson | NJ Advance Media [\(C lick for more\)](#))

[Continue](#)

After the shock, "he gasped for air and started breathing on his own," said Root. "From there he continued to improve. We saw him blink and move his eyes a little bit."

Root said that local police, fire and rescue departments were all on site in less than 10 minutes. The athlete was then rushed to Robert Wood Hospital.

Colonia Athletic Director Pellegrino LaSala praised everyone involved.

"Between the Edison staff, their A.D. Jeff DiCocco, and my freshman coaches, they saved that kid's life," said LaSala, the father of the Colonia coach, Joseph. "They got that AED on the kid in 45 seconds. I teach CPR and the use of AED because I am a certified instructor and I always tell people that you really don't know what's going to happen until you are under the gun....Forty-five seconds is excellent. The longer it takes, the less chance of survival. That's a fact from the American Heart Association."

LaSala said his son and his assistant coach were immediately aware that the situation was serious.

"He's had some medical problems and had gotten cleared (to compete), so our coaches were aware of that," said LaSala, who said the young athlete is also a soccer player at Colonia. "I can't thank the people at Edison enough, and I'm proud that my coaches knew what to do and did a great job."

The Colonia A.D. said the young man is doing okay today. "He's alert, has been transferred to another hospital, and they are doing a barrage of tests now," said LaSala.

When news spread of what happened in Edison, someone without ties to either team was elated to learn that a child was saved as a result of an AED.

After his daughter Janet passed away in 2006, Jim Zilinski and his family fought for six years to finally get Janet's Law passed.

"When I saw that today it made my day," said Zilinski. "It makes everything we've gone through, all the pain, all the suffering, and all the crying so worth it, because there is not going to be another family that had to go through what we went through. I am elated that this child is here and that family is not going to feel that pain. That's why we pushed the law.

"This is the ninth case where a life has been saved since Janet's Law was implemented," Zilinski added. "It's five students that we know of, and the rest are grandparents, teachers, custodians. That is what the law is there for. To protect all those that are there, students, visitors, employees."

The N.J. Department of Education and the N.J. Department of Health each said there's no reporting mechanism associated with Janet's Law to determine how many times mandated AEDs have been used.

"We always knew our daughter would do good had she been given a chance to live a longer life, but it is a great comfort to know that her name is forever linked to saving lives," said Zilinski.

DiCocco said Edison had an AED on its premises when he became A.D. in 2008, well before the law's passage, and the school is now equipped with approximately a dozen AED's that are readily available in different parts of the school.

"Janet's Law is helping a great deal," said Root. "We take into account safety and health here at Edison and had an AED before the law, so we would have been ready either way. But the great thing about it is that the law forces schools and coaches to be certified and to keep up to date in training for these type of things. Having the AED's on site is great, but the training is equally important."

Steve Timko, the Executive Director of the NJSIAA, the state's governing body for high school sports, agreed Janet's Law has been a life saver.

"I believe this is at least the fourth time since the law was passed that we've had a life saved as a result of the AEDs," said Timko. "What price can you put on a persons life? It's just fantastic what's been able to be done."

Root and Blevins are uncomfortable with being hailed as heroes.

"I don't see it as being a hero," said Root. "I see it is part of my job and my responsibility, and I'm just glad that I was able to perform those duties," said Root. "It's a great feeling to save someone, and I'm happy for him and his family. Hopefully he recovers."

LaSala said everyone at Colonia High School and the surrounding community are devastated about what happened, but LaSala said everyone should look at the bright side.

"It's a big blessing that he's still here with us," said LaSala. "At least we can hang our hat on that."
