Importance of **Fruits and Vegetables** in Sports

Fruits and vegetables provide the body with nutrients necessary for the body to utilize energy during practice and competition. In addition, a diet rich in fruits and vegetables and low in fat decreases the risk of cancer, cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure and diabetes. For young athletes, making wise food and beverage choices is just as important as practicing and learning the game.

The best source of micronutrients is a variety of food. Megadoses of supplements do not make up for the lack of a healthy diet, training or talent, and in certain cases may be dangerous.

Eat a well-balanced diet that contains a variety of foods, including fruits and vegetables. Frozen, canned and dried fruits and vegetables can be just as nutritious as fresh, as long as they do not have added sugars or fats. Look for canned fruits “packed in its own juice.”

Intense exercise and excessive perspiration can affect the body’s supply of sodium and potassium. Incorporating potassium-rich foods such as bananas, oranges and tomatoes will help ensure potassium needs are met. Eating a normal meal following competition will replace sodium lost through perspiration.

**Recommendations:**

- Be a good example; eat fruits and vegetables!
- Encourage children to start their day with fruit or fruit juice.
- Encourage parents to make fruits and vegetables available as an after-game snack; after an exercise session, children are usually thirsty and hungry and will eat whatever is quickly available.
- Encourage children to ask for extra helpings of fruits and vegetables, and to ask their parents to buy fruits and vegetables for meals and snacks.
- Fresh fruit or energy bars with dried fruit are a good snack before practice and competition.