

Introduction to the Tactical Athlete Special Issue

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This special issue of the *Journal of Athletic Training* is focused on the tactical athlete. The phrase *tactical athlete* describes individuals in service professions (eg, military, firefighters, law enforcement, and emergency responders) who typically have significant physical fitness and performance requirements associated with their work. To achieve mission success, these individuals face stressful, rigorous, and demanding challenges, often under life-threatening conditions, while carrying heavy gear and equipment.

Athletic trainers have been working with this population, especially military service members, for decades. However, awareness of the hundreds of athletic trainers and researchers who serve this population is limited. Athletic trainers work with all the military branches, from the academies to recruits to special forces. For example, we developed the Warrior Athletic Training Program for soldiers in training at Fort Benning, Georgia. This program embedded 33 part-time and full-time athletic trainers in units across the Army post for the past 7 years. Serving the thousands of soldiers who came through Fort Benning

enabled us to develop multiple new collaborations with programs and people across the country. These efforts have helped to spread the word about how athletic trainers can aid our military services in improving performance and readiness while also enhancing health, wellness, and quality of life for service members.

The Warrior Research Center and the hundreds of athletic trainers across the country continue to work toward improving training and decreasing injuries in our warfighters. The mission of the center is to bring together researchers, military and tactical personnel, and commercial partners with the goals of improving the readiness, equipment, health, and wellness of our war fighters, tactical responders, veterans, and families.

Working with tactical athletes brings special challenges and unique rewards compared with other populations. The goal of this special issue is to share some lessons learned from working with these exceptional athletes who dedicate their lives to serving us.

Editor's note: JoEllen Sefton, PhD, ATC, is the director of Auburn University's Warrior Research Center, an associate professor in the School of Kinesiology, and director of the Neuromechanics Laboratory. She is also a JAT Editorial Board member. Lieutenant Colonel Todd A. Burkhardt, PhD, is a professor of military science and commander of Army ROTC, Indiana University, Bloomington. He is a member of the advisory board to the Warrior Research Center, Auburn University, AL.