

**NEWS**

## **Kentucky middle school athlete saved by AED, quick response after collapsing at practice**



**Stephanie Kuzydym**

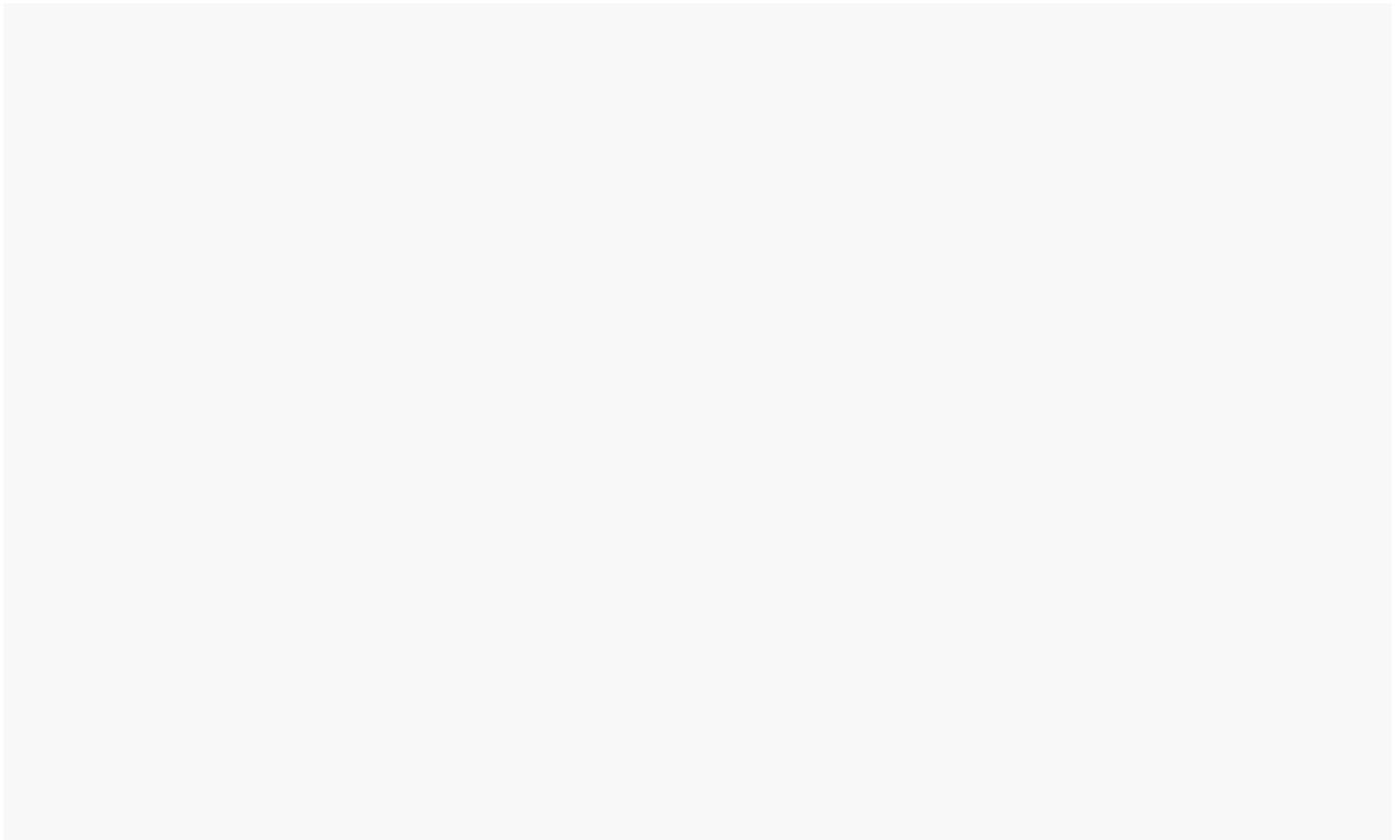
Louisville Courier Journal

Published 5:36 p.m. ET June 30, 2023 | Updated 9:54 a.m. ET July 1, 2023

Brittany Woodward never thought she would use an AED on a middle school student.

Woodward didn't even know who he was when she got the phone call at 6:05 p.m. on June 20 that a football player was "unresponsive".

She knew that keyword "unresponsive" meant she was absolutely taking her portable automated external defibrillator, or AED.



She ran about 200 yards across Nelson County's football field and soccer field to where football practice was taking place for Old Kentucky Home middle school, willing herself to go faster, to be at this athlete's side.

*"Please don't let it be as bad as I think it's going to be," she kept repeating in her mind. "Please let it not be as big as what this coach just described."*

She was just about to finish her first year as high school athletic trainer after graduating Bellarmine with a master's degree in 2022. There were just three days of practice until the start of the Kentucky High School Athletic Association's "dead period," or the time in which sports aren't allowed to practice across the state.

The middle school coaches had already begun the CPR compressions they'd been trained to deliver. Head coach Willie Moore, also the athletic director at the middle school, called 9-1-1 just before he called the high school athletic trainer to get responders en route.

**Safer Sidelines:** The Courier Journal spent several months investigating sudden death in high school sports. Here's what we found.

It's all part of their venue-specific emergency action plan that is posted across Nelson County's athletic facilities.

It was just another Tuesday with multiple football and soccer practices across campus when the AED advised Woodward that no pulse was found on the middle school football player, advising her to hit the button to deliver a shock.

She pushed that button at 6:09 p.m.

That's four minutes from time of collapse to shock delivered.

And that shock, the boy's cardiologist later told Woodward's bosses, is what made all the difference in this story being about a save.

"Plain and simple, AEDs can save a life," Woodward said.

Safer Sidelines, a Courier Journal investigation published in April, found that sudden death in athletes often comes because of the lack of equipment, preparation, response and trained personnel on sidelines. Following the death of a Louisville athlete in 2008, a state law was passed requiring all public schools to have a venue-specific athletic emergency action plan. That plan at Nelson County High School directly impacted the positive outcome in this case.

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**Safer Sidelines investigation:** Here are the main findings from The Courier Journal's investigation.

Nelson County High School has five sport-specific AEDs located at its sports fields and courts: one in the main gym, one in the auxiliary gym, one at the baseball stadium and two at the football and track field.

That means despite the one she was carrying, there were two more AEDs she ran by and within 200 yards of the athlete's collapse. Gold standard emergency sports medicine response is that an AED is accessible within three minutes.

Matt Reynolds has been the athletic director for Nelson County High School for four years, but around athletics for the last 15. This is the first instance he can remember of an AED being used for athletics, but said equipment and sideline sports medicine personnel are important for high school athletics.

"Just for this instance right here," Reynolds said. "It saved a kid's life."

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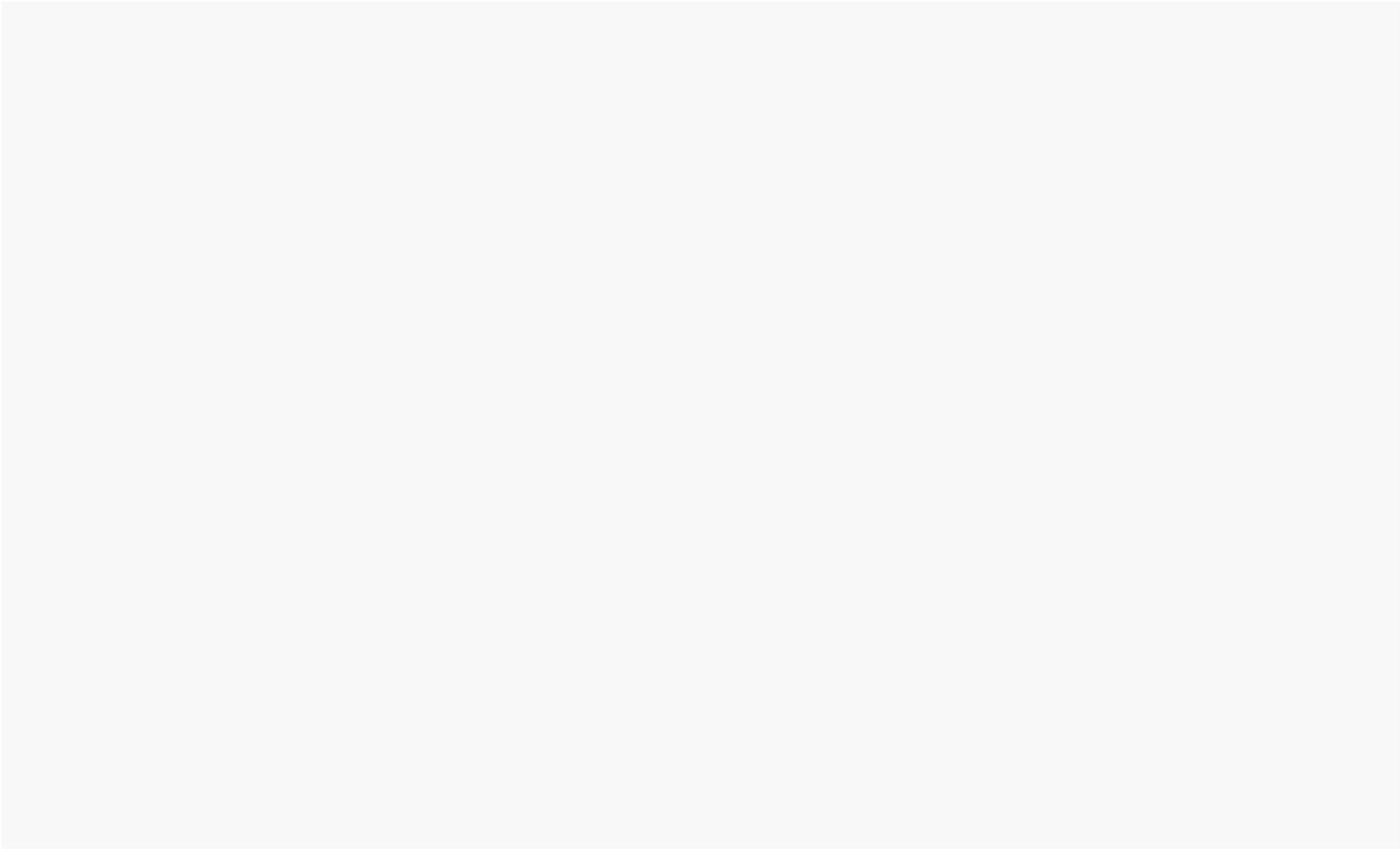
House Bill 331, which calls for AEDs in high schools and middle schools, was signed into law by Gov. Andy Beshear in April. The law doesn't mandate, or require, schools to have an AED because that would be an unfunded mandate. The bill's co-sponsor Rep. Kim Moser has been working since 2017 to set up a trust fund to help schools with the problem. The Courier Journal investigation found that the per-participant expense of an AED in Kentucky is \$3.07.



**Safety in youth sports:** 4 takeaways from the Courier Journal's 'Safer Sidelines' event on sudden death in sports

**Health, safety plans in sports:** Most Kentucky public schools don't follow emergency planning law, leaving athletes at risk

"Other schools should learn the importance of having an AED on or around your facilities and to make sure your coaches are well trained," Reynolds said.



Both Woodward and Reynolds said Moore, a coach in his 20s, kept his composure and guided his team away from the medical scene.

As he directed them away, Woodward made sure the coaches who were delivering the chest compressions were delivering compressions about two inches deep, while she set up the AED.

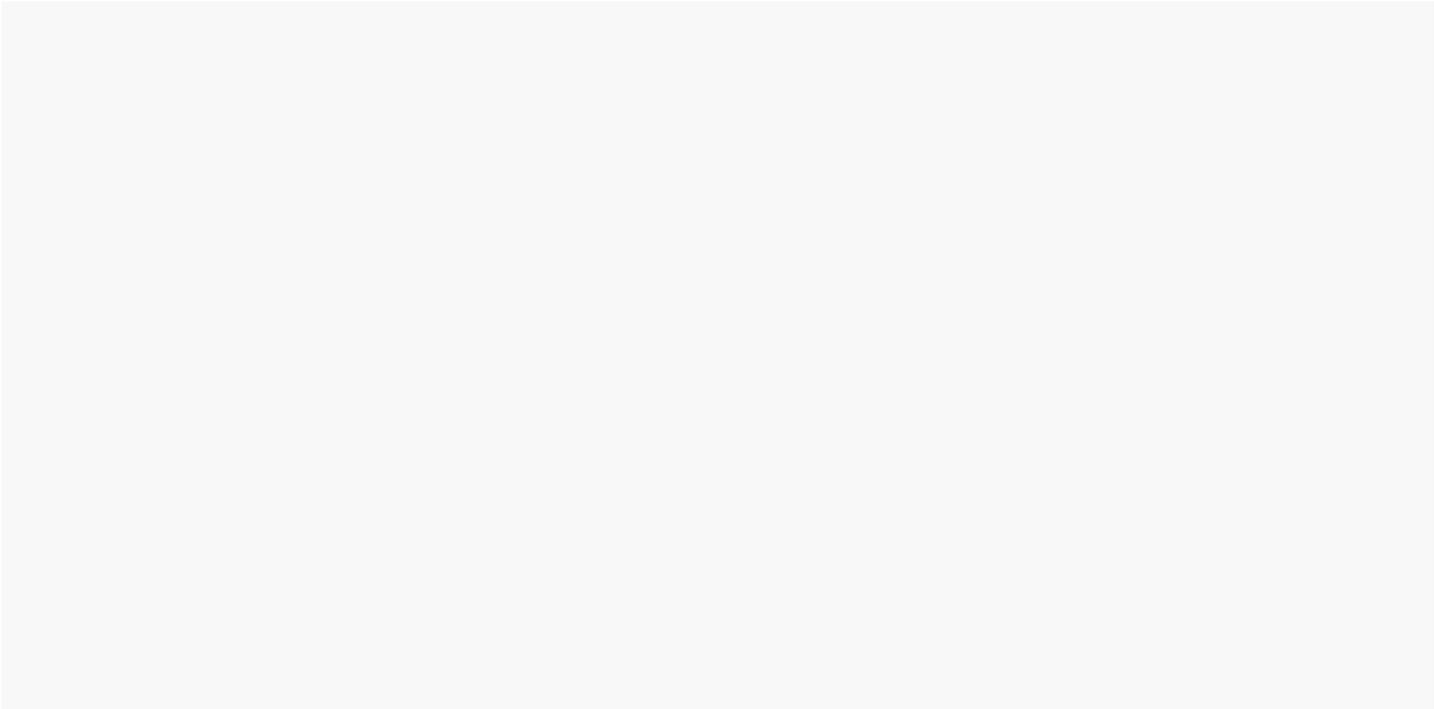
*"This is happening," she thought. "It's really happening. Ok, focus. Put on the pads ..."*

The AED instructed a shock was advised. Woodward repeated the instructions loudly for the whole group. They stood clear. She hit the button. The AED advised to resume compressions. That's when Woodward felt the boy's pulse.

Now, Nelson County coaches are asking for more training. They want to be even better prepared for an emergency.

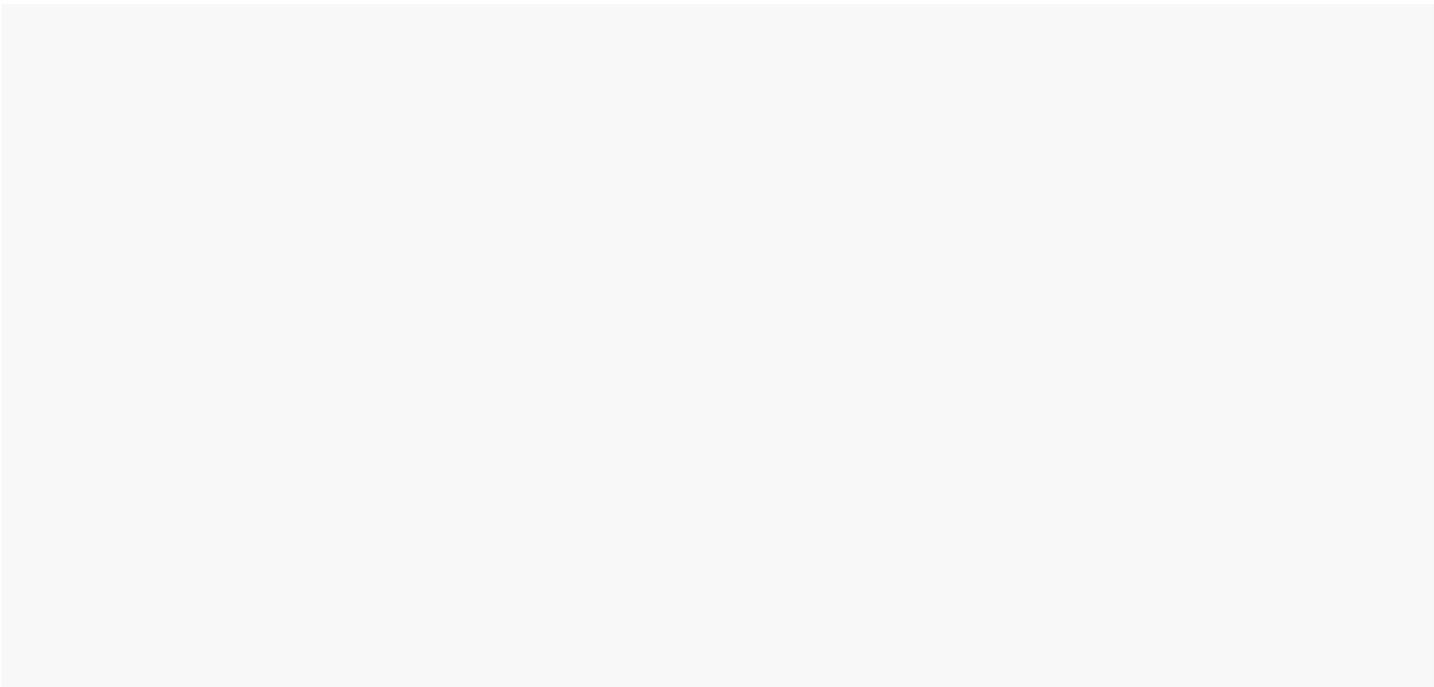
"We're certainly going to practice events like this," Reynolds said. "We practice all the time for active shooters and fires and tornados. Cardiac arrest drills need to be a part of that as well."

The middle schooler is currently receiving treatment in Louisville and doing well.



"The teamwork shown in the event last week by coaches at Old Kentucky Home Middle School and our athletic trainer at Nelson County High School highlight the importance of emergency action planning and preparation," said Kevin Brown, who oversees KORT high school athletic trainers at 37 Kentucky high schools, including Nelson County.

**Related coverage:** When a Kentucky athletic trainer taught CPR to a team's coaches, he saved a life - his own



As she waits for daily updates, Woodward has re-run through the situation with multiple bosses and administrators, as well as another athletic trainer who works with AT Cares, a program that offers support to athletic trainers dealing with the aftermath of a critical incident.

"What would have happened if I wasn't at school or the coaches didn't know to call me or they didn't know to start CPR?" she said. "It's almost eerie to think about – if they didn't know to do it in that order., that kid might not have had the results we had today.

"I'll take this result every day of the week."

