



FOR RELEASE:
March 1, 2007

CONTACT:
Dan Reynolds
Communications Coordinator
(734) 780-2116
(734) 780-2143 Fax
dan@midwesteyebanks.org

Sports Eye Safety Month: Play Hard, Play Safe!

[Ann Arbor] – From major league stadiums to small-town courts, America's favorite pastimes make great memories for many. But for more than 40,000 athletes, those memories are ruined by eye injuries, the vast majority of which were preventable.

In recognition of April's Sports Eye Safety Month, Michigan Eye-Bank and Lions of Michigan urge all athletes to wear appropriate protective eyewear. Efforts to protect athletes' eyes can prevent eye injuries and infections that may lead to cornea transplants.

High school senior Gina Gonzales knows the importance of wearing protective eyewear, but only after a basketball injury caused her to lose vision in her right eye. It only took the poke of a finger during a game to give Gonzales an infected corneal ulcer, leading to irreparable damage. "I couldn't see out of my right eye at all," she recalls. "My left eye was straining a lot. I was getting bad headaches from the strain." Without a cornea transplant to restore her sight, Gina's basketball career, academic performance and possible college scholarship would have been threatened.

Gonzales' nightmare is all too common among athletes. Sports-related eye injuries range from abrasions of the cornea and bruises of the lids, to internal eye injuries, such as retinal detachments and internal bleeding. Unfortunately, some of these athletes end up with permanent vision loss and blindness.

Today, athletes can choose from various types of sturdy, lightweight, effective and fashionable eyewear. With polycarbonate lenses and proper fitting by an eye care professional, eyewear does not hinder performance and can prevent 90 percent of sports eye injuries. Some professionals, including NBA All-Star Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and NFL Hall of Famer Eric Dickerson, have already gotten the message - sports eye protection doesn't hinder performance; it protects eyes and careers.

Basketball, football, hockey and baseball aren't the only sports that contribute to the thousands of eye injuries suffered each year. Soccer, tennis, golf and water sports also are dangerous to the eyes. Different kinds of protective eyewear are available for different sports, and Michigan Eye-Bank recommends that athletes seek the assistance of an eye care professional to ensure the correct eyewear is used.

The long-term benefits of playing sports are clear, but sports are the leading cause of eye injuries in children. Most sporting leagues don't require their young athletes to wear eye protection, yet when they do, the occurrence of eye injuries is greatly reduced. For now, it is up to parents and other adults to make sure children use appropriate eye protection.

In order to promote eye health and the prevention of eye injury and disease, Michigan Eye-Bank offers a free eye disease and injury prevention kit geared towards early elementary school students and their families. To include this program in your students' or child's' curriculum, please call Michigan Eye-Bank at (800) 247-7250, or visit our Web site, www.michiganeyebank.org.

The Michigan Eye-Bank is a 501(c)(3), independent, not-for-profit organization dedicated to the restoration of sight. It recovers, evaluates and distributes human eye tissue for transplantation. It also supports research into the causes and cures of blinding eye conditions, promotes donation awareness through public and professional education, and provides humanitarian aid to people in need of corneal transplantation throughout the world.