

Resilient or reckless? Robust debate on Risk and Reward in sport

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Strong, vigorous, sturdy and rugged are all synonyms applicable to the word “robust”.¹ A glass of full-bodied South African cabernet sauvignon may also be described by the sommelier as “robust” and I hope that this South African Sports Medicine Association (SASMA) edition of BJSM will linger on your intellectual palate as it highlights key issues around the debate on contact and collision sport.

Highlighting potential risks

The infographic on p... highlights the many benefits of exercise for children. Do these benefits extend to contact and collision sports or are the risks indefensible? The “risk-and-reward” discussion is fascinating as it spans the realms of both scientific and public debate. This can be treacherous territory. Implementing robust scientific findings into a public arena is, of course, what we strive for, but when does private and public opinion begin to inform “scientific” work? Allyson Pollock and a group of “70 academics, doctors and public health professionals” sent an open letter to the British government in 2016 calling for a ban on tackling in school rugby.² Kirkwood and Pollock’s editorial “Evidence in support of the call to ban the tackle and harmful contact in school rugby. A response to World Rugby” brings this issue into our scientific and clinical domain. Publishing what many may regard as an opinion piece in BJSM is contentious but can be defended in the interest of subjecting the issues raised to more systematic scrutiny.

Critics (and indeed the reviewers) of the Pollock group’s work may take issue with an apparent inconsistent application of rules, cherry picking of facts, self-contradictory statements, selective use of data subsets and straw man fallacy. Is this a methodical and valid editorial or political advocacy masquerading as scientific work? Hence, the Kirkwood paper should, indeed must, be read in the context of the Ken Quarrie-led review “Facts and values: On the acceptability of risks in children’s sport, using the example of rugby” (pp). Let the debate evolve under the scrutiny of BJSM readers.

Tackling the issue...

Several papers in this edition highlight outstanding research into risk reduction in contact sport that provide a constructive alternative to the “ban tackling” approach. Michael Hislop and Keith Stokes’ group (pp) from Bath University and the Rugby Football Union publish an excellent cluster-randomised controlled trial demonstrating that a preventative

movement control exercise programme *can* reduce injuries, including concussion, in schoolboy rugby players.

The Berlin Concussion Consensus meeting highlighted the potential for sideline video analysis to help identify concussions.³ Ross Tucker (www.sportsscience.com and @ScienceofSport) takes this further, using video analysis to analyse head injury events in Rugby Union in two excellent pieces (pp....) of original research that speak to each other. (Tip-off: look out for more Rugby video injury analysis work from the RFU in the pages of BJSM soon...)

South Africa's @BokSmart (of course)

What would a SASMA-edition be without a contribution from BokSmart, South African Rugby's world-renowned injury intervention programme? James Brown and Wayne Viljoen outline BokSmart's ambition of *VisionZero* catastrophic injuries while co-author Australian epidemiologist Caroline Finch leads another editorial highlighting the work of BokSmart, FIFA 11+, FootyFirst and other injury sports injury prevention programmes.

The "Heading in Soccer" discussion is another that has easily found its way into the lay press.⁴ In the most thorough systematic review yet undertaken on the issue, Anthony Kontos' meta-analysis finds no conclusive evidence for adverse outcomes from heading the soccer ball.

This is likely to be highly cited work.

By the way, watch out for the World Rugby-led Concussion Implementation Meeting (Dublin, July 2017). A collaboration of eight identified core sports (Australian Football (AFL), International Equestrian, FIFA, International Ice Hockey (IIHF), IOC, NFL, Rugby League and World Rugby) designed to get the "Best out of Berlin." BJSM is sure to publish feedback.

On the sideline....

For those who are not into tackling as a pastime, there are still some enthralling clinically-relevant titbits in this edition: the PEDro synthesis on ACL injury prevention exercises (pp), a BMJ synopsis on Acute Achilles ruptures (pp) and Johann Windt's latest personality profile, this time with the #AnnoyinglyPersistentButReliable Brit in Oz, Liam West (soon to release a BJSM video demo of the SCAT5 – keep watching...)

The reward: SASMA Congress 2017

The biennial SASMA Congress takes place in the shadow of Table Mountain, Cape Town from 24-27 October. Inspired by the Cape's fine wines (can we tempt you?), there will be a blend of fruity topics, raw science and delectable discussions (programme available at <http://www.sasma2017.co.za/index.php/programme>). Meet South African sports medicine stalwarts and the BokSmart team, raise a Rugby debate with Ross Tucker and a glass of Rose' with legendary Willem van Mechelen. A paediatric sports medicine course is on offer. BJSM will be well represented by deputy editor Babette Pluim (with sidekick Michael Turner) and editorial board member, social media Wonder Woman Claire Bower. Kudos to convenor and SASMA President, Dr Phatho Zondi – terrific sports medicine leadership. Like the wine, this Congress keeps improving each passing year.

So, TACKLE this edition with enthusiasm: relate, debate and translate! That's what SASMA and BJSM do best.

References

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