



Concussion Timeout; Blow the Whistle!

It all comes as part and parcel of playing the game of sport; we take the good with the bad, hard knocks with the soft. Yes injuries are a part of the game. They happen every weekend across every sporting body, and indeed happen to every part of the body. From Paul O'Connells ankle to Aidan Walsh's hamstring, it's a constant flow of conversation. Then why is it no one seems to want to talk about the most common injury of all; CONCUSSION?!

Concussion, a common sequence of trauma to the head in contact sports, is in fact the third most common match day injury, and yet we still let it stand as the elephant in the room; a subject we just don't talk about!

The issue of concussion became significantly highlighted last Autumn with the retirement of Leinster and Ireland hookers John Fogarty and Bernard Jackman. Both Fogarty and Jackman decided it was time to step down from the game of rugby due to the consequences of compound concussions citing constant headaches and mood swings.



As players get bigger, the force of the concussion is becoming greater and the consequences even unbearable. Quite simply, all sports have a duty of care to their protagonists. Indeed that is their first duty. All else is secondary.

Players are their own worst enemy, and so need to be protected from themselves. They are not honest with their coaches and they are not honest with themselves; no-one will volunteer to sit out. You're a team player; putting your body on the line for the team is what you do. But when is enough, enough?! The answer is simple; *When in doubt, sit it out*

As a result, and in an effort to bring about a significant cultural change toward the issue of concussion, it is up to all coaches and mentors alike to educate and practice for a better approach to concussion management.

Brain Injury specialists Acquired Brain Injury Ireland have outlined guidelines for best practice concussion management through their Concussion Awareness Education Campaign. This campaign answers the questions that coaches and mentors have about Concussion; with recommendations of best practice guidelines...

It is always best to err on the side of caution when dealing with something as complex and vital as the brain. The brain is made up of soft tissue; cushioned by blood and spinal fluid. When a player gets a knock to the head the brain suddenly shifts inside the skull, knocking against the skull's bony surface. This jolt can happen at a strong force explaining the severity of the individuals' concussion. This causes a change in brain function, which can result in a variety of symptoms from headaches and nausea, to sensitivity to light and noise. As mentors and coaches it is important to

educate oneself on the injury of concussion; becoming familiar with all related signs and symptoms, in an effort to diagnose the player correctly. A concussed player should be removed from play immediately and should be assessed by a medical doctor. Post-concussive symptoms may intensify with any increase in activity, so it is important that a players 'return-to-play' is gradual and monitored by a medical professional.

Any player who continues to play while concussed, or returns to play too soon after a concussion increase their risk of suffering from second impact syndrome. Second Impact Syndrome (SIS) is where a second concussion occurs before a first concussion has properly healed, causing rapid and severe brain swelling and often catastrophic results. Second impact syndrome can result from even a mild concussion that occurs days or weeks after the initial concussion.

As you can see the brain is in fact 'no play toy' – it is a vital organ that we must take care of. No 'magic water' or 'warrior words of encouragement' should be used as a method of treatment for an injury such as Concussion. Coaches today must now protect players from themselves and make the tough call, to pull a player out of a game after a hard hit.

Things must change around concussion. Players will, in the future, take it more seriously because they will have learned from others, their coaches and mentors. This change can only take place if you become the change, so lead out by example and protect our players; educate them to protect themselves, and finally making it acceptable to say you are concussed, and you're sitting it out!

This article is brought to you as a part of ABI Ireland's Concussion Awareness Campaign
Concussion.ie

For more information on concussion signs, symptoms and return to play guidelines see
www.concussion.ie

CONCUSSION

DO'S

Do remove a player from the field if you even suspect that they have been concussed, or even taken a hard hit to the head

DONT'S

Don't let a player return to play after a CONCUSSION unless he/she has been cleared medically; clinical and neuropsychological assessments are important

DANGER'S

Second Impact Syndrome (SIS) – If a player continues to play while concussed, or returns to play too soon after a concussion he/she increase their risk of suffering from Second Impact Syndrome; where a second concussion occurs before a first concussion has properly healed, causing rapid and severe brain swelling and often catastrophic results.