

INJURY RISK REDUCTION PRACTICES IN SPORTS COMPETITION

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Abstract

Injury, which comes with participating in sports, has always dealt a big blow to the careers of many athletes. This has consistently removed the shine and reduced participation in sports. Many of the injury reported in sports are avoidable as most participants seldom think about it until it happens. Most competitions are event organizers do not consider risk management a top priority when planning sports meets. Unfortunately, risks are known to be an integral part of sports practice. Quality risk management processes which help sports even organizers are required to ensure smooth sailing injury-free competitions. This paper thus analyses some steps in identifying, evaluating and managing the unavoidable risks that go with participating in sports, recommending some tips that can help to minimize the incidence of injury like making use of high standard equipment and facilities and swift hazards identification among others. This will go a long way in significantly reducing the prevalence of injuries in our sports meets while avoiding litigation and encouraging larger participation.

Keywords: Risk, risk management, safety, hazard, sport injuries

Introduction

Health care professionals encourage participation in physical activities as sports as numerous positive effects on a person's health and well-being (Warburton, Nicole and Bredin, 2006). However, risk to health, safety and well-being is implicit to sport and recreation. Many sports and recreational activities involve high speed impact, extreme effort, use of various equipment and environmental factors such as weather. It is vital to include primary injury prevention and make this a public health priority as this may have significant implications on reducing long-term consequences of musculoskeletal injuries, such as early post-traumatic osteoarthritis. Injuries which many consider to be an integral part of sports have consistently put an end to the careers of many sportsmen. Reducing injury risk is a big challenge for sports competition organizers. Many sports competition organizers give little or no priority to consideration for injury reduction during sports meets.

Chalmers (2002) described sport injury as any unintentional or intentional damage to the body resulting from participation in any competition or game, requiring physical effort that is undertaken for amusement, diversion, or fun. Whereas for Olympic sports, an injury/illness is defined as any musculoskeletal problem that has received medical attention regardless of the consequences of an

absence from competition or training. An injury can cause many serious defects for a sportsperson such as decrease in performance, not able to resume game again, physical disability and death in some cases. Sports injuries can lead to time loss and missed matches. Powell and Barber-foss (1999) further investigated a variety of high school sports and defined time loss injuries as those in which players were withdrawn from the current session involving all athletes with fractures, tooth injuries, or head injuries. Sports injuries in healthy young people have a significant impact on their participation and performance in subsequent activities. Siesman, Blitvich, Telford and Finch (2011) found that prolonged injury or illness can limit sporting activity or lead to abandonment or fear of returning to sport in healthy young people. Research has highlighted many psychological factors that athletes commonly experience after injury such as feeling of isolation, anxiety, fear of re-injury, but frustration, depression, anger and tension stand out as the emotions athletes encounter when injured. Henke (2012) observed that increasing sports injuries is unfavourable to the business perspectives of sport good industry, sports associations and commercial service providers in many respects. Injuries reduce the chances of winning in competitions. Occurrence of injuries also increases the danger of losing investments into the growth of youth sports. It also damages the reputation of sport as a health promoting venture, it increases the danger of being prosecuted in court which explains the relatively high insurance rates.

Sports injury is caused by accident, impact, poor training practices, lack of proper sports facilities and equipment, lack of conditioning, insufficient warm up, tears of ligaments, tendons, joints fractured bones, and head injuries. According to a recent study from the United States of America Department of Health and Human Services, an estimated 2.9 million injuries annually occur at a sports facility, athletic field, or a playground. Sports and recreation participants are always exposed to various hazards and safety issues before, during and after activities. Yang, Geniey, Somaira N., Khaled a., (2013) opined Exposure to hazards can cause injury in sports, which could be mild or serious leaving the victim to suffer either partial, or permanent disability, or death. Hazard is something with the potential to cause harm or be a "source of harm" such as tripping, falling, broken bones from trauma or impact, flying balls, slips, exposure to hazardous environments or substances, injuries from contact with machines or devices. In sports and recreation, the environment is a common element and potentially dangerous to the participants. Environmental dangers can lead to injuries. Only one hidden defect at an event can cause a participant to slip, fall leading to injuries. Some of the most common safety hazard issues that lead to injuries in stadiums and areas emanate from structural failure, crowd incidents, blocked exits, tripping hazards, critical incidents, pyrotechnics, persistent standing in seated areas. Others include; spilled liquids and slippery floors, uneven walkways, uneven or broken stairs, broken chairs or stands, broken railings or lack of a necessary railing and spectator violence.

Participants have a right to be protected from harm caused by “hazards” present in an activity. The dangers at sporting events also include fights or arguments due to a lack of security injuries from drunken spectators, pedestrian injuries or car accidents due to poor or inadequate traffic controls. Other examples of spectator injuries include overcrowding in a sport venue, poor crowd control, unsafe seating or poorly constructed stands.

The Importance of Injuries Prevention in Sports Competition

With proper precautions, injuries often associated with sports competition can be prevented through the use of quality protective equipment-padding, helmets, shoes, mouth guards, pre-participation screening, proper warm up, suitable equipment, acclimatization and proper hydration guidelines has helped to improve safety in sports. Accordingly, Sharma and Parveen (2016) stated that sports facilities have a significant role in the prevention of sports injuries. Sports should be safe and enjoyable, it will never be hazard-free, but with good accident prevention strategy, accidents associated with hazards can be prevented. Safety should be an organization’s core value in providing facilities and services to consumers. Safety is the state in which the risks of harm by accidents to persons or of property damage is reduced to, and maintained at or below, an acceptable level through a continuous process of hazard identification and risk management (Zakaria, Taib and Harun, 2016). If safety is not ensured, activities carried out could create problems and disasters for people and the society in general.

As the risk of injury is high in many sports, there must be due diligence in using risk management as a strategy to keep everyone safe during sport competition. Risk management is therefore a proactive process (Getz, 2005; Wideman, 1992). Risk management also keeps an organization safe from legal issues. Emery and Pasanen (2019) opined that: “The “best” injury prevention program is the one that can and will be adopted and sustained by athletes, coaches, and sporting bodies. Injury prevention research has gained ground and is being used in real world settings (physio-pedia).

Risk Management

As part of the planning for a sports competition, it is important to have a risk assessment plan in place to identify potential incidents and emergencies and act in the event of an incident. The need for risk management in preventing risk of injury in sports competition cannot be over-emphasized, the safety of athletes, spectators, staff, volunteers and the public depends on having a comprehensive and logical approach to risk management. Risk management practices are the foremost important element when planning sports competition. Fuller (2007) affirms that risk management provides a structured framework within which risks are often identified, evaluated, assessed and controlled through appropriate mitigation strategies. Risks cannot be completely ruled out in sport, so strategies for dealing

with risks in sporting competition, such as the risk of injury, the risk of losing money or money and the risk of damage to sports facilities, must be formulated. Risk in sports is the possibility of injury, damage, or loss to sports organizations; this indicates the possibility of injury to participants, property damage, or other loss to the organization, directors, volunteers, or others (sportslaw.ca).

According to Miller and Veltri (2003), the risk in sport has to do with injuries during sporting activities or economic losses and damage to sport facilities. When classifying risks in sport, Ross (2005) divided the risks in sport into risk of injury, loss of reputation, risk of damage to sports facilities and financial loss. Risk management is the result of a number of steps. Effective risk management applies a clear process to identifying, analyzing and evaluating event-related risks. Using this framework, you can implement, communicate and monitor control measures to ensure that the risk level is managed within agreed risk tolerances in order to reduce the prevalence of injuries in sports competitions.

Risk Management Strategies

The following are risk management strategies to reduce injuries in sports:

Step 1: Risk Identification

According to Rocha. (2020) Risk assessments are simply a careful examination in what could cause harm to people. We do them in order to access whether you have got taken enough precautions or need further precautions to stop harm from occurring. First, effective risk management requires an awareness that risk identification is only one process of a comprehensive risk management requires an awareness that risk identification is only one process of a comprehensive risk management program, not its entire purpose.

The first stage of risk assessment is identification of the risk factors associated with the sport and determination of how these may impinge on stakeholders. Identifying risk is that the most vital step to any effective risk management process as without having the ability to sport a risk, there is no thanks to treat it. Participants normally represent the main stakeholder in most sports but other stakeholder includes, for instance, officials, spectators, the media and therefore the public. A hazard is something with the potential to cause harm or a “source of harm”. Risks are often the results of people interacting with a hazard or source of harm. Potential hazards should be identified, to prevent risk to injuries to those involve directly or indirectly in sports activities.

Step 2: Risk Analysis and Evaluation

Once a risk has been identified the next step is to determine what the likelihood and the consequence of the risk is using the risk matrix table. The magnitude of the risks identified must be analyzed to determine how significant the risk level is and

also evaluated in order to describe the best risk mitigation strategies using the most common tool known as Risk Matrix.

Low risks should be acceptable with routine procedures.

Medium or high level risk should be managed to reduce the probability and potential impact.

Extreme risks are unacceptable and must be eliminated.

Step 3: Risk Mitigation

One notable exception to the generic risk management strategies research void is Berlonghi's (1990) five strategies for risk controls. These five strategies are: avoiding, reducing, prevention, separation and transferring. Risk treatment involves identifying the range of options for treating the danger, evaluating those options, preparing a risk treatment plan and implementing that plan. It is about considering the choices for treatment and selecting the foremost appropriate method to realize the specified outcome. The following are ways to manage risk:

Standard treatment options include:

- i *Accepting the Danger:* For instance, most of the people would consider minor injuries from participating within the sporting activity as being an inherent/acceptable risk.
- ii *Avoiding Risk:* Cancelling or changing the activity is one way to avoid risk.
- iii *Reducing the Risk:* It may be possible and acceptable to reduce the likelihood or consequence (or both) of a risk through a certain action, policy, equipment. For example, the use of mouth guards for players in some contact sports may reduce the likelihood and consequence of a risk to an acceptable level.
- iv Transferring the danger fully or partially will general occur through contracts or notices for instance via the policies of the association that you team plays within – i.e. increase coverage, lease agreements, waivers and warning signs
- v Retaining the danger is knowing that you simply might not be ready to eliminate the danger but instead acknowledging the danger is a crucial part of the game activity and a few risk must be retained due to the inherent nature of the game activity. If retaining the danger, it is important to think about the likelihood and consequence of the danger.

Step 4: Risk Communication and Documentation

Examples of techniques that can be easily used to speak and interact with these groups throughout the hazard management planning and execution process include:

- i Pre, during and/or post competition surveys safety and risk management.

- ii Table board exercise (including simulation of emergency scenarios) for all important stakeholders, including external supplier/contractors
- iii Registration forms
- iv Planning workshops
- v Stress tests (e.g. carrying out various scenarios with security staff)
- vi Signage

Adequate communication of the risk management plan to all those responsible for the implementation of their control measures, or whose cooperation or participation is necessary for the success of the risk management plan effective communication helps to ensure that every personnel roles and responsibilities are clear.

Step 5: Monitor and Review

After the treatment of a risk is determined, it is critical that the club continue to monitor the risk to ensure that the likelihood or consequence does not change and that the treatment identified is correct and effective

Continuous review of all potential risks to the club is also critical to ensure that the club is proactive in recognizing any changes that will expose the club to additional risk over time. Every event/week/month while some, like governance guidelines, can also take place every 6 or 2 months.

Conclusion and recommendations

Injuries and accidents in sports competition are unavoidable if not handled properly. The current challenge is to implement concurrent policies and practices to promote “safe sport” and “physical activity” by identifying and managing the risks associated with the sport and to implement the latest advances in control measures. The practice of risk management is an important pillar in the implementation of activities in sports and leisure facilities in order to make the people’s environment more prosperous, more harmonious and free from the risk of injury and accident. It should be noted that no one size fits all. When it comes to risk management, the risk management approach must be tailored to the standard of care and the specifics of the sport.

Risk management is a strategy for trainers and sports even organizers to prevent and minimize the risks associated with sports activities. From this explanation it becomes clear that risk management practices are poised to produce various positive effects on the standard and thus the well-being of society through sport and leisure activities. Indeed, in the conduct of life being safe and secure is the right of every individual in the pursuit of activities. Risk management is of the utmost importance in the management of sports competition. A conducive and safe environment might be created if all the strategies of risk management practices are

implemented during sports competition and thus participants will feel safe and free from injury during the activities.

In reducing the risk of injury during sport competition, it is imperative that sports even organizer considers the following:

- i Create the risk assessment documents that will list the hazards identified for your sporting events and suggest contingencies to lesson or eliminate the risks.
- ii Provision of training in risk management to sport associations, sports event organizers and sport administrators.
- iii Sports event organizers should follow industry standards, rules and regulations in providing a safe environment.
- iv Ensure that the design, development and maintenance of sports and recreation equipment and facilities meet recognized safety standards and monitor the effects on injury reduction.
- v Fair play should be reinforced.
- vi Playing surfaces must be well maintained and kept clear of debris or obstructions and conditions should be monitored.
- vii The coaching staff should instruct their players on the correct use of equipment.
- viii Enforcing rules about wearing of personal safety equipment in sports where this is applicable.
- ix Outdoor facilities should be checked for uneven playing surfaces, including holes, uneven grade, or moisture. The playing area should be also checked for additional obstacles.
- x An indoor court should be clear of any obstacles or obstructions surrounding the out of bounds areas. The actual playing surface should be clear, safe and dry.
- xi Certification and continuing education should be essential for all coaches and officials to inform them of new injury prevention information.

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