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Concussion – Controlling Conflict!

How to deal with irate players, parents, coaches or referees

Why you?

As a coach or referee you are often the first person at the scene of a potential concussion, especially when it happens during practices – so it is important to get this right.

BokSmart is an educational initiative that empowers you as a coach or referee to make more informed and very important on-field decisions that may prevent further or serious injury to one of the players under your care.

The knowledge that you would have gained from attending the BokSmart courses every 2 years and also from reading the additional freely available information on the BokSmart website and social media platforms, enables you to recognise and suspect a potential concussion and then take appropriate action in the best interests of the safety, long-term health, and well-being of the concussed player.

Not intervening in a situation where a player has a suspected concussion or notable head or neck injury may compromise that player's career or even life in certain instances. This is never easy when working with emotive and irate people, and many times can become an uncomfortable situation to deal with. The key here is to remain calm, always stay objective and not bring emotions into the fray!

Remember – concussion is NOT simply a 'head' injury, it's a BRAIN injury!

A concussion is an **injury to the brain** caused by a direct or indirect blow to the head or caused by the head striking something else such as the ground or a bony hip. A concussion can occur **whether or not a person is "knocked out."**

References: Field side SCAT (Zurich 2012) McCrory P, et al. Br J Sports Med 2013;47:250–258;
IRB Player Welfare <http://www.irbplayerwelfare.com/?documentid=module&module=21>;

We worry about concussions because:

- The injury may mimic something more serious such as a bleed on the brain.
- There may be other associated injuries such as neck injuries.
- A second blow to the injured brain before the brain has fully recovered may result in a much more serious brain injury or even death.
- A concussed player may suffer physical symptoms (headache, dizziness etc.), emotional changes, sleep disturbances and poor concentration for days or even weeks after the injury – more detail around these can also be sourced at <http://boksmart.sarugby.co.za/content/concussion>
- Repeated brain injuries may also have permanent residual or remaining effects

Remember – you only have to **SUSPECT a concussion** to remove a player from the field.

As a coach or referee it is **NOT** your job to diagnose the concussion!

Be Prepared, Professional and Proactive

Some practical tips for dealing with anger or resistance from players, parents, spectators, other coaches or referees when having to remove a player from the field due to a suspected or clearly evident concussion.

1. Before a match – be proactive and prepared!

- Meet with the participating coaches and referees beforehand and confirm that you are all BokSmart certified and that you will all be approaching the game according to the IRB and SARU's medical and concussion-related regulations and guidelines
- Confirm that if anyone clearly suspects a concussion, they will immediately bring this to the attending medical staff's and then referee's attention, who will then stop the game and ask for the player to be removed according to regulation.
- Determine if there are dedicated team medical support staff and/or field side medics available, and in discussion with them, emphasise the need for cooperation and support of one another in the case of suspected concussions, and serious head or neck injuries.

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2. During the match/practice – be professional!

- Ensure that all players and spectators clear an area around the injured player, and do not directly interfere with the medical management of that injured player, even if they are one of your own
- Marshall the medics or assistants to move the injured player from the field; remember to have them properly **stabilise the head and neck** on a spinal board, using standard spinal injury protocols, if the player is not fully conscious or a when a serious head or neck injury is also suspected
- Remain calm and don't lose your temper if someone tries to interfere

Useful phrases that may assist you in a difficult situation

- “I am a BokSmart certified coach/referee and suspect that this player may have suffered a concussion – we need to follow all the necessary precautions”
- “SARU regulations require that a player that is suspected of being concussed must be permanently removed from the field”
- “I am not only concerned about this player's current condition, but, if he suffers another blow, that could be catastrophic – we need to follow all the necessary precautions just in case”
- “Removing the player now, will allow him the best chance of playing Rugby again sooner – we need to follow all the necessary precautions.”
- “Removing the player NOW has his long-term health and well-being in mind, and is in the player's best interests”

Useful tools that will support your actions (All of these are available at www.boksmart.com)

- The BokSmart Concussion Guide (which you receive every two years at the course)
- The Field side SCAT Card
- The IRB Pocket Concussion Recognition Tool
- A Concussion Advice Sheet

3. After the match/practice – be proactive!

- Follow up with the injured player and/or the parents or guardians afterwards
- Reiterate that the player may not return to sport that day
- Emphasise that the player should seek medical advice, preferably from a medical doctor with knowledge about concussion, as soon as possible

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- Give the player or accompanying person a Concussion Advice Sheet
- Send a letter or email to the player's coach, parents, manager or Head teacher reporting the concussion and advising that SARU's age-specific stand-down periods and graduated return-to-play guidelines as listed on www.boksmart.com MUST be followed
- Suggest that any aggrieved persons contact the **Medical Department** at SARU directly for clarification of SARU's protocols, which can also be sourced from www.boksmart.com under the Concussion website link: <http://boksmart.sarugby.co.za/content/concussion>.
- The SARU Concussion Regulations can also be found using this website link: <http://boksmart.sarugby.co.za/content/boksmart-legislation>

Document Compiled by Dr Jon Patricios

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