Scapula winging in a sports injury clinic

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Scapula winging is an uncommon condition but one which may be underdiagnosed. Four patients with scapula winging referred to a sports injury clinic are presented. None of the patients was aware of any trauma and a traction injury to the long thoracic nerve is proposed as the aetiology of this condition. These case reports emphasize the importance of excluding winging of the scapula in patients who present to sports injury clinics with shoulder pain.

Keywords: Scapula winging, sports injury clinic

Four patients from a variety of sports attended the clinic with scapula winging over an 18-month period and are presented below.

Case reports

Case 1
A 23-year-old right-handed boxer was referred with pain in the right shoulder of 8–10 weeks’ duration. He had been training normally but there was no history of particular trauma. On examination he had winging of the right scapula. The winging recovered spontaneously over an 18-month period.

Case 2
A 50-year-old weightlifter presented with 1 year’s history of an abnormal appearance of the right shoulder. There was no history of trauma. On examination he had winging of the right scapula. Electromyographic (EMG) studies demonstrated a neurogenic lesion of the serratus anterior in isolation. No recovery occurred over 1 year and he was discharged from follow-up.

Case 3
A 27-year-old right-handed squash player presented 6 months after a sudden onset of aching in the right shoulder and a loss of power in the right arm while playing squash. On examination (Figure 1) he had winging of the right scapula. This recovered spontaneously over a 6-month period.

Case 4
A 38-year-old right-handed rugby player experienced a sudden onset of pain in the right shoulder after a game of rugby, although he was unaware of injury during the game. Examination demonstrated scapula winging which recovered spontaneously over the next 6 months.

Discussion
Four cases of scapula winging were detected in a sports injury clinic over an 18-month period. Scapula winging is said to be a rare condition, the subject of some 250 case reports since first described in 1825. The incidence among sportsmen may be higher, Gregg et al. detecting ten cases in a sports injury clinic over a 3-year period. Trauma has been the precipitating factor in many of the previous case reports. Scapula winging has been classified into static or dynamic types, and of bone, joint, muscle or nerve aetiology. The cadaveric studies of Gregg et al. suggested that the most likely aetiology in the...
The absence of precipitating trauma and the non-specific history may explain why scapula winging may be underdiagnosed. These case reports therefore emphasize the importance of considering scapula winging in patients presenting to sports injury clinics with shoulder pain or loss of function. Routine testing for scapula winging (by pushing against a wall with the shoulder flexed to 90°) should be performed in all patients with shoulder problems.

References
Scapula winging in a sports injury clinic.

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doi: 10.1136/bjsm.27.2.90