Tackles, tears and troubles… a South African Sports Medicine Association perspective

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RUGBY RETURNS
Rugby Sevens returns to the Olympics this August after an absence of over 90 years. South African Seabelo Senatla, pictured on the cover, is one of a number of international Rugby Sevens players with poetically-sounding names. Akira Ioane (New Zealand), Nathan Haryama (Canada), Collins Injera (Kenya) and Savenaca Rawaca (Fiji) have titles of similar allure for rugby commentators. The truly international reach, fast pace and tempo of the sport viliﬁ the Olympic motto of ‘Citius, Altius, Fortius’. However, the debates surrounding the risks of collision sport, the discussions around injury epidemiology and prevention as well as the ubiquitous grey cloud of doping are unlikely to evaporate in the midst of Olympic euphoria. This South African Sports Medicine Association (SASMA)-led BJSM edition scrutinises these aspects of sport.

TACKLES…
The contentious call by a group of UK-based ‘health experts’ for a ban on tackling in school rugby⁰ has provoked much print and social media comment,¹ both oﬃ cial²,³ and provocative.⁴ The widely followed Dr Ross Tucker carefully analyses the data in a global sporting and scientiﬁc context (see page 921). He illustrates how assessment, estimation and evaluation of risk should precede policy implementation. Banning tackling at youth level may actually have detrimental eﬀ ects for the sport. Read why.

An emerging theme in the sports and exercise medicine literature, and collision sport in particular, has been that of injury prevention. With the tackle identiﬁed as the main area of risk, emerging South African rugby researchers Dr Nick Burger and Dr Sharief Hendricks (see page 932) ﬂ y the BokSmart flag. They led a cohort study that illustrated the importance of contact skill training and the correct technique to employ in tackling based on technical and video footage criteria developed by Australia’s Dr Tim Gabbett.⁶ The tackle is, of course, also strongly associated with concussion in rugby. Bath’s prodigious rugby researcher, Professor Keith Stokes, illustrates how return to play in the same season after a diagnosed concussion is associated with a 60% increased risk of any time loss injury. A re-evaluation of graded return to play protocols and postconcussion rehabilitation incorporating proprioception, neuromuscular control and coordination may be appropriate.

TEARS (…AND TESLAS)
A recurrent ACL tear must be one of the most despondent scenarios faced by an athlete (and the medical team). Lead author Polivios Kyritsis, from Erik Witvrouw’s Qatar group, eloquently outlines six key discharge criteria for mitigating rerupture risk. These are key ﬁ ndings for rehabilitation therapists, who would do well to print out Yann Le Meur’s (@YLMSportScience) accompanying infographic (see page 952). This paper deserves the wide access (free) that comes with being Editor’s Choice. In a similar vein, PhD candidate Nirav Maniar illustrates how isometric strength, passive straight leg raise and dynamic strength measures can guide return-to-play decisions after hamstring tears (see page 909). And, from China and Germany, Dr Wei Dong’s systematic review and meta-analysis examines tennis elbow ‘tears’ (see page 900). Who has not been tempted to opt for the ‘quick fix’ option of a corticosteroid inﬂ ation?

Today, most would associate the term ‘Tesla’ with South African-born disruptor and billionaire Elon Musk’s electronic car company. But the ‘T’ more pertinent to musculoskeletal radiology is the unit of magnetic ﬂ ux density applied to MRI. In two editorials, Professor Ali Guermazi and Professor Frank Ryan eloquently outline the units of magnetic resonance imaging into the high incidence of acute illness in coalition (see page 984). Martin has recently become Director of the Institute for Sport, Exercise Medicine and Lifestyle Research, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Pretoria. This is an IOC research centre (one of only nine in the world). While enjoying the poetic rhythm of the Sevens Rugby Olympians, look out for some excellent work from this clinical and research group as South African sports clinicians continue to tackle issues, prevent tears and avoid trouble.

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REFERENCES