Infographic. The first position statement of the Concussion in Para Sport Group

Richard Weiler ^{1,2,3} Cheri Blauwet ^{4,5} David Clarke,⁶ Kristine Dalton ⁷ Wayne Derman ^{8,9}
 Kristina Fagher ¹⁰ Vincent Goutteborge ^{11,12} James Kissick ^{13,14} Kenneth Lee ¹⁵
 Jan Lexell ^{10,14} Peter Van de Vliet ^{16,17} Evert Verhagen ¹⁸ Nick Webborn ^{19,20}
 Adam Virgile ²¹ Osman Hassan Ahmed ^{3,22,23}

BACKGROUND

A concussion is a common injury in many sports, including para sport. Aside from a more comprehensive need for concussion education, clinicians face difficulties applying concussion assessment and management guidelines to para athletes.¹ At present, there is a lack of para-sport concussion research, and prior International Concussion in Sport (CIS) consensus papers have not addressed this specific population. To rectify this issue and improve concussion management provided to para athletes, the Concussion in Para Sport (CIPS) multidisciplinary expert group was created.²

METHODS

The CIPS group undertook an in-depth analysis of issues specific to the para athlete within the established key clinical domains of the current (2017) Consensus Statement on Concussion in Sport.³ The existing Sports Concussion Assessment Tool 5 (SCAT5) was evaluated as part of this process and helped identify para athlete-specific concerns. Four CIPS working groups were tasked with exploring the following key clinical areas of concussion in para sport described in the most recent consensus statement of concussion in sport²:

- Concussion assessment;
- Concussion management;
- Return-to-sport following concussion; and
- Specific considerations related to the different impairments in para athletes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Regular preparticipation and periodic health examinations in the para athlete are essential to determine a baseline reference point for concussion symptoms but pose challenges for the interpreting clinician.

Concussion in the para athlete population should be managed according to existing concussion consensus guidelines using the CIPS assessment tools (see <https://bjsm.bmj.com/content/bjsports/suppl/2021/04/09/bjsports-2020-103696>).

DC1/bjsports-2020-103696supp001_data_supplement.pdf, <https://bjsm.bmj.com/content/bjsports/suppl/2021/04/09/bjsports-2020-103696>. DC1/bjsports-2020-103696supp002_data_supplement.pdf). Paradoxically, while SCAT5 baseline testing cannot be mandated for para athletes, the clinician attending to a para athlete with a suspected concussion has a much greater need to have a comprehensive understanding of a para athlete's preinjury cognitive function and physical abilities to make a diagnosis of concussion and manage the athlete more effectively.

Due to the lack of validity of the SCAT5 in general populations and even greater variability of baseline scores between different disability groups,⁴ a para athlete may have a concussion even if his or her SCAT5 is deemed to be 'normal'. Despite their limitations, regular preparticipation and periodic health examinations along with the SCAT5 help guide the assessment of a suspected concussion for each para athlete impairment group.

As part of the overall assessment, an attending medical professional may choose to seek a corroborative history from suitable family members, caregivers or members of the athlete's entourage who are familiar with the athlete's baseline level of function, if available, to assist in clinical decision-making. In addition, it is strongly

recommended that a team clinician with prior knowledge of the athlete is involved in the acute assessment of the potentially concussed athlete. Further considerations for concussion management of the para athlete are required within the remove, rest, reconsider and refer consensus statement framework. Considering a return to sport (RTS), the 2017 CIS consensus statement has limitations when considering the RTS of the para athlete. Case-by-case decision-making related to RTS following concussion is imperative.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Additional challenges exist for the evaluation and management of concussion in para athletes. Looking ahead, further research is needed to develop a greater understanding of existing knowledge gaps and attitudes towards concussion among athlete medical staff, coaches and para athletes themselves. Future research should investigate the use, reliability and validity of common assessment tools in the para athlete population. Concussion prevention strategies and sport-specific rule changes, such as in Para Alpine Skiing,⁵ Cerebral Palsy Football⁶ and sports for athletes with visual impairment, should also be considered to reduce the occurrence of concussion in para athletes.

¹Amsterdam Collaboration on Health & Safety in Sports, Department of Public and Occupational Health, Amsterdam Movement Sciences, Amsterdam UMC, University Medical Centers – Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

²Sport & Exercise Medicine, Fortius Clinic, London, UK

³Para Football Foundation, Arnhem, The Netherlands

⁴Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, Spaulding Rehabilitation, Spaulding Hospital/Brigham and Women's Hospital, Harvard Medical School, Boston, Massachusetts, USA

⁵Kelley Adaptive Sports Research Institute, Boston, Massachusetts, USA

⁶University of Hertfordshire, Hatfield, UK

⁷School of Optometry & Vision Science, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada

⁸Institute of Sport and Exercise Medicine, Division Orthopaedic Surgery, Dept of Surgical Sciences, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Stellenbosch University, Cape Town, South Africa

⁹IOC Research Center, Cape Town, South Africa

¹⁰Rehabilitation Medicine Research Group, Department of Health Sciences, Lund University, Lund, Sweden

¹¹Amsterdam UMC, University of Amsterdam, Department of Orthopaedic Surgery, Amsterdam Movement Sciences, Meibergdreef 9, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

¹²Section of Sports Medicine, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

¹³Department of Family Medicine, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

¹⁴Medical Committee, International Paralympic Committee, Bonn, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Germany

¹⁵Spinal Cord Injury/Disorder, Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation, Medical College of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA

¹⁶Immune-Oncological Centre Cologne, Cologne, Germany

¹⁷Former Medical & Scientific Director International Paralympic Committee, Bonn, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Germany

¹⁸Department of Public and Occupational Health, EMGO, Amsterdam UMC Locatie VUmc, Amsterdam, Netherlands

¹⁹Centre for Sport and Exercise Science and Medicine, University of Brighton, Eastbourne, UK

²⁰School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences, Loughborough University, Loughborough, UK

²¹College of Nursing and Health Sciences, University of Vermont, Burlington, Vermont, USA

²²Physiotherapy Department, University Hospitals Dorset NHS Foundation Trust, Poole, UK

²³University of Portsmouth School of Sport Health and Exercise Science, Portsmouth, UK

Correspondence to Professor Evert Verhagen, Department of Public and Occupational Health, EMGO, Amsterdam UMC Locatie VUmc, 1081 HV Amsterdam, The Netherlands; e.verhagen@amsterdamumc.nl

Twitter Cheri Blauwet @CheriBlauwetMD, David Clarke @ClarkeGB7, Wayne Derman @WDERman, Kristina Fagher @KristinaFagher, Vincent Gouttebarger @VGouttebarger, Jan Lexell @JanLexell, Evert Verhagen @Evertverhagen, Nick Webborn @SportwiseUK, Adam Virgile @adamvirgile and Osman Hassan Ahmed @osmanhahmed

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ORCID iDs

Richard Weiler <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6216-839X>
Cheri Blauwet <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8568-1009>
Kristine Dalton <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2616-4797>
Wayne Derman <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8879-177X>
Kristina Fagher <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9524-7553>
Vincent Gouttebarger <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0126-4177>
James Kissick <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7748-9225>
Kenneth Lee <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9378-673X>
Jan Lexell <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5294-3332>
Peter Van de Vliet <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1434-3659>
Evert Verhagen <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9227-8234>
Nick Webborn <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3636-5557>
Adam Virgile <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2146-7964>
Osman Hassan Ahmed <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1439-0076>

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