

An injured football player is like a bird that can't fly: Identifying facilitators and challenges in a professional football team for an injury prevention program

Maayan Bresler, BPT, MSc¹, Evert Verhagen PhD²

¹ Sport and Muscle-Skeleton Physiotherapist, Lecturer

² Co-director of Amsterdam Institute of Sport Science, Co-chair Amsterdam Collaboration on Health & Safety in Sports

Abstract

Background: Football is a high-intensity contact sport associated with a high incidence of injury. Despite the vast knowledge that exists today in the field of injury prevention, injury rates remain relatively high. This statistic raises the need to consider injuries and their prevention as a broad and complex phenomenon, while adopting a sophisticated and contextual approach, which includes additional factors besides the physical ones.

Objective: The article describes the process of identifying guidelines for developing an injury prevention program for a sports team. The program was adapted for a specific football team, considering the barriers and difficulties that characterize it, and was designed according to the beliefs, opinions and perceptions of all staff members and players in the team.

Methods: All data were collected from semi-structured individual interviews with 11 stakeholders working with a football team competing in the Israeli Premier League. Open-ended questions were asked about injuries, injury prevention, and various influencing factors on injuries. After coding all data, according to the thematic analysis approach, a model was designed visually representing the main themes.

Results: The main issues that emerge from the interviews are primarily related to the high demands the team players face. Stakeholders' challenges and the ways they cope with them were identified. It was found that while there is broad knowledge about injury prevention and the physical consequences of injury among the team and the players, insufficient attention is given to the mental consequences, which affect the players and their performance.

Conclusion: An optimal approach to injury prevention must consider both the physical and mental aspects. The appropriate development of mental resilience in players, before the injury and during the rehabilitation period, will provide the player with the means to better cope with an injury in the future and improve performance in the present.

Keywords: injury prevention, context, resilience, football