

GETTING BACK IN THE GAME AFTER CONCUSSION AND INJURY

Mental skills consultants help with recovery process

CHAGRIN FALLS, Ohio – April 2013 – Regardless of whether you are a youth or elite athlete, returning to your sport after an injury, especially a concussion, can be a complex decision. Sport psychology consultants can help to determine when the time is right – both physically and emotionally.

For an athlete experiencing a concussion, the process to wellness can seem especially difficult. Unlike physical injuries with observable visible signs (i.e., a broken arm in a cast), concussions are “invisible injuries.”

Dr. David Coppel, Director of Neuropsychological Services with the Seattle Sports Concussion Program and Certified Consultant with the Association for Applied Sport Psychology (CC-AASP), explains that each concussion, or mild traumatic brain injury, is different. He has spent the last 15 years evaluating Seattle Seahawks players to make sure they are ready to return to action after suffering a concussion. “Some players may experience headaches and fatigue, while others have mood issues and increased irritability or feel socially isolated,” said Dr. Coppel.

The complexities of having a concussion vary for each individual, as some athletes may have additional risk factors, such as attention deficit disorder. According to Dr. Coppel, those types of issues can often delay an athlete’s recovery time. Another concern is that those with concussions may be unable to attend school for a period of time, which leads to stress regarding academic success.

Sport psychology consultants with AASP use their skills to help athletes of all levels deal with behavioral and emotional symptoms, such as a sense of vulnerability and a “not feeling like themselves.” They also provide support for the general impatience with recovery, especially if it is not the first concussion or injury an athlete has experienced. The decision of when to return-to-play is crucial, as it is key to preventing more serious injuries.

Athletes with concussions also have some of the same issues as an athlete with a broken leg or sprained ankle. Guilt over letting the team down, anxiety about returning to play and fear of re-injury are common concerns. Sport psychology consultants assist the athlete in developing mental coping techniques and goals to deal with the frustration and isolation and can help to determine when the time is right to return to action.

“It is important to help an athlete get perspective on the situation, and to remember that in the vast majority of individuals with a concussion, they recover completely,” explained Dr. Coppel.

For a complete listing of AASP Certified Consultants, visit www.appliedsportpsych.org. The organization’s website offers a free Resource Center with articles on a variety of topics, including injury and rehabilitation.

The Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP) promotes ethical practice, science and advocacy in the field of sport and exercise psychology. Founded in 1986, AASP is an international, multidisciplinary, professional organization that offers certification to qualified professionals in the field of sport and exercise psychology. With more than 1,600 members in 39 countries, AASP is a worldwide leader, sharing research and resources with the public via its website, www.appliedsportpsych.org.