Canadian High School Coaches’ Experiences, Insights, and Perceived Roles With Sport-Related Concussions

Jeffrey G. Caron
McGill University

Gordon A. Bloom
McGill University

Andrew Bennie
Western Sydney University

There is a need to improve concussion education and prevention efforts for youth athletes and those responsible for their care. The purpose of this study was to understand Canadian high school coaches’ insights and perceptions of concussions. Using a case study design, eight high school coaches were interviewed and the data were analysed using a hierarchical content analysis. Findings indicated that participants primarily acquired information about concussions through their own experiences as athletes and parents, and from reports in the sports media. The coaches’ felt their role with concussions was to teach athletes safety techniques during practices and competitions and to encourage them to accurately report their concussion symptoms. In addition, participants forwarded a number of recommendations to improve the dissemination of information to coaches. Results from this study will add to a limited body of concussion research with youth sport coaches. Participants’ insights provide researchers and clinicians with information about coaches’ perceived role with sport-related concussions.

Keywords: coaching science; brain concussion; qualitative research; concussion education; concussion-reporting

Concussions have been termed the silent epidemic because of the injury’s prominence in North America and around the world (Carroll & Rosner, 2012). Specific to sport, youth athletes often experience more severe concussion symptoms and take longer to recover than adults (Davis & Purcell, 2014), facts that are concerning given the injury’s high incidence rates in youth sports (Lincoln et al., 2011; Marar, McIlvain, Fields, & Comstock, 2012). Among youth sport participants, high school football, ice hockey, soccer, and basketball athletes have reported a high incidence of concussions (Lincoln et al., 2011; Marar et al., 2012). Evidence also suggests that athletes underreport concussions (Delaney, Lamfookon, Bloom, Al-Kashmiri, & Correa, 2015; Kroshus, Baugh, Daneshvar,)

Jeff Caron is a PhD candidate in Sport and Exercise Psychology at McGill University. His research is focused on understanding the psychosocial aspects of concussions, including the optimal ways of educating athletes, coaches, and parents about the injury and recovery process. He has been involved in ice hockey as an athlete and coach and worked with high school and university athletes as a mental performance consultant.

Gordon Bloom is an associate professor and the director of the Sport Psychology Research Laboratory in the Department of Kinesiology & Physical Education at McGill University. He has developed an internationally-recognized research program in coaching science, which includes investigating various social and psychological factors affecting the rehabilitation and return to sport of concussed athletes.

Andrew Bennie is the director of the Health and Physical Education program at Western Sydney University in Australia. His research interests include sports coaching and coach education; Indigenous sport, education and physical activity; and teaching and learning in health and physical education. He has published 18 peer reviewed journal articles and book chapters. He has also coached high school soccer and field hockey for 10 years.

Address author correspondence to Jeff Caron at jeffrey.caron@mail.mcgill.ca.