

12 Concussions in professional sports

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Introduction

A professional athlete who suffers a concussion garners a great deal of media attention, which can prompt discussion and debate about concussive injury and management. This can be very beneficial, as it often involves reviewing the signs, symptoms, and dangers of a concussion. Treatment algorithms are often discussed, and the possibility of prolonged healing has also been highlighted in several high-profile cases. Many researchers believe the increase in diagnoses of concussion over the past few decades have been due in large part from a greater public awareness of concussions stemming from media coverage of professional athletes who have suffered concussions (Hainline & Ellenbogen, 2017; Wennberg & Tator, 2008). Unfortunately, the public has also witnessed professional athletes returning to sport too soon after injury. Cases of athletes returning to competition after a traumatically induced loss of consciousness or before a thorough concussion evaluation has taken place can serve to confuse and misinform the media and viewing audience (Delaney et al., 2000; McLellan & McKinlay, 2011). This chapter will examine the media coverage of concussions in professional sports as well as the concussion rates amongst different professional sports (including the “big four” North American sports), the different protocols and league policies governing concussion diagnosis and management, the reality of concussion underreporting in professional athletes, and the unique aspects of managing professional athletes with concussions.

Rates of concussion in professional sports

Concussions have seemingly been on the rise in professional sports, a fact which is likely in large part due to increased awareness of the signs and symptoms of the injury (Gouttebauge et al., 2017). Despite research on the diagnosis and incidence of concussions increasing in the past several years, it is still difficult to provide an accurate global estimate of concussion incidence and prevalence (Hainline & Ellenbogen, 2017; Putukian, Aubry, & McCrory, 2009). This may be attributable to the fact that concussion rates in many sports and recreational activities have not been studied, and that the concussion rates in different sports