

Return to Play Following ACL Injury in Professional Soccer Players in The United Kingdom – A Comparison Of Media Prediction, Public Perception and Actual Findings

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Summary:

The media consistently under-estimate the duration of time that it will take for a player to return to first team play following ACL reconstruction surgery.

Abstract:

Introduction:

The purpose of this study was to assess frequency of media reporting of ACL injuries and to compare the time predicted by the media before the player will return to play and the actual time taken for the player to return to play. The time that the general public estimated was also compared to assess the influence of the media prediction.

Methods:

An Internet search was performed to identify professional footballers suffering an ACL injury. We recorded the date of injury and the date the player was first selected for a competitive match, the time between these two dates determined to be the time to return to play. Multiple media sources were reviewed to identify the estimated media time to return to play. A survey of fans was also conducted specifically asking what their estimated time of return to play would be and what reasoning they based their opinion upon.

Results:

25 players suffered an ACL tear and all received surgery. Mean return to play was 9 months (range 6-16), median was 9 months and mode 10 months. The overall mean media predicted time to return to play was 7.3 months. Mean return to play in the Premiership was 8 months (media prediction 6.5 months) compared to 9.5 months in the Championship (media prediction 8.4 months) and 10 months in the Scottish Premier League (media prediction 10 months). No injury was career ending but 36% of players suffered a recurrent knee injury. 36% of injuries were sustained in a tackle. The general public estimated return to play would be 6.5 months, with most stating that they based their answer upon media information they had reviewed at some point.

Conclusion:

The media consistently under-estimate the time taken to return to play following ACL injury. ACL injury in the professional footballer results in a long absence from play but is not career ending. The general public is clearly influenced by the media prediction and may place unrealistic expectations upon the players and club to return to play too soon.