The Prevention of Injuries in American Flag Football

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Summary:
Implementation of the prevention program significantly reduced the incidence rate of injuries.

Abstract:
Introduction:
American flag football (AFF) is a non-tackle, contact sport. Many moderate-severe contact-type injuries have been reported. In the 2007-9 playing seasons, the authors conducted a two-season prospective injury surveillance study (historical cohort). This study revealed a high incidence of injuries to the fingers (caught in the opposing player's pockets), face, knee, shoulder and ankle. The objective of this study was to introduce a one-season, injury prevention program in an attempt to significantly reduce the incidence and the severity of sports-related injuries in AFF, as compared to a historical cohort.

Methods:
A prospective injury prevention study was conducted in Kraft Stadium, Jerusalem, Israel. There were 724 amateur male (mean ± SD age, 20.00 ± 3.05 yrs) and 114 female (mean ± SD age, 21.20 ± 7.23 yrs) players. Four prevention measures were implemented: The no-pocket rule, self-fitting mouth guards, ankle braces (for those players with recurrent ankle sprains) and an injury treatment information brochure. An injury surveillance questionnaire was administered to record all time-loss injuries sustained in game sessions.

Results:
The two-tailed t-test, as well as the Levene's test for equality of variances, showed a highly statistically significant reduction in the number of finger injuries, and ankle sprains (p<0.01). There was no statistically significant difference in the severity of injuries. The rate of compliance with the intervention methods ranged from between 40-60%.

Discussion:
Implementation of the prevention program significantly reduced the incidence rate of injuries. Further development of prevention strategies is needed. This should involve the strict enforcement of the no-pocket rule, appropriate head gear, self-fitting mouth guards, the use of ankle braces and changing the blocking rules of the game.