

# The Society of Sports Therapists

## Press Release

### Medical Study Reveals Sepp Blatter and 'tired' players may have a point

A clinical paper recently delivered by Professor Graham Smith, Chairman of The Society of Sports Therapists at The 14<sup>TH</sup> International Congress of The World Confederation for Physical Therapy held in Barcelona, will undoubtedly cause concern for Arsene Wenger, Sir Alex Ferguson and many other league managers throughout the UK. Professor Smith has identified the sports hernia to be a growing problem in professional football and for the first time, data received directly from physiotherapists and sports therapists looking after the players, has cited lack of rest as one possible contributory factor.<sup>1</sup>

The study, undertaken by Professor Smith, from the PhysioTech Clinic, Glasgow and Paul O'Connell, (former Sports Therapy student at London Metropolitan University and now studying at University of Teesside), set out to determine whether there was a specific problem in professional football and also to look at reasons why it might be occurring.

Questionnaires were sent to 132 professional clubs and 84 were returned. 71 of the clubs who responded reported incidences of sports hernias the previous season, with a ratio of 1.3 per club.

The sports hernia or 'groin disruption' is an injury severely affecting the muscles and tendons of the groin and has been significant in professional football since the eighties. While the popular view is that a footballer's hernia is 'an old mans problem' results showed players over 32 were least affected. This age group accounted for only 2% of the players who had problems last season while the 23- 27 year olds catered for 41% of the sample.

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London based surgeon Mr Jerry Gilmour identified the syndrome of groin disruption back in the eighties and undertook the first repair. Since then he has reported over 1000 procedures on professional footballers.<sup>2</sup>

The sports hernia is seriously debilitating for a footballer and symptoms become progressively worse when running, sprinting, twisting, turning or kicking. Simply getting out of bed or a car can cause pain as can sit-ups or coughing or sneezing.

Professor Smith commented:

'Groin pain now accounts for five per cent of all soccer injuries, which is cause for considerable concern. We were looking to see if there were any significant, contributory factors. Pre-season training, which so often gets the blame for many injuries at the start of the season, came out relatively unscathed. Matches accounted for thirty - six percent of the injuries and training came in twenty-one percent higher at fifty seven percent.'

Much criticism has been heaped on professional players bemoaning the fact that they are playing too many games with no time to rest. Patrick Vieira complained in vain to his manager Arsene Wenger of feeling tired last season following his exploits at the World Cup in Japan. For some, the general feeling is that the size of a player's salary should compensate for player fatigue. Professor Smith disagrees. He said:

'The modern game has changed greatly since the 80's. Players undoubtedly train harder and play more games. International players in particular get little time for rest. Pre-season for some clubs is now underway and we have only just finished the last round of international matches.'

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He continued: 'The comments of the therapists at the clubs were particularly significant in this study. Overuse through constant kicking and twisting and lack of rest between games were cited by many as possible contributory factors.'

However, previous studies have pointed to long ball kicking and kicking from dead ball situations as being possible causes of the sports hernia. While midfielders and free kick experts fit into this category, it could also be assumed that goalkeepers would be prime candidates. Results in this study proved contradictory with only 3% reporting any problems. Defenders and midfielders would appear to be the prime candidates each sharing top place with 31%.

Footballers everywhere may also be interested in another significant comment from the club therapists. As former Wimbledon striker John Fashanu so capably demonstrated in 'I'm A Celebrity Get Me Out of Here', hours can be spent every day undertaking punishing sit-up routines in search of a toned and sleek mid-drift. Well, if you have a weak lower back and suffer with back problems be warned, you may be heading in the direction of a hernia which could seriously cramp your style.

Surgery still remains the only option for repair of the sports hernia and the success rate is extremely high. For Professor Smith however, such a situation is not good enough. He said:

'From a player's perspective it is clear that there is a serious problem here and we seem to acknowledge its existence, deal with it through surgery but do nothing to actually prevent it happening. The sports hernia is also now starting to appear in rugby, cricket, running and riding. It cannot all be coincidental. We must do more research to find a root cause.'

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Notes to Editor

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A. Sports Hernia - A disruption of the posterior abdominal wall without a clinical hernia being present.<sup>3</sup>

## References:

1, 2 & 3. Professor Graham N Smith, Paul O'Connell, The Incidence of Sports Hernia  
in Professional Soccer in the United Kingdom.

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