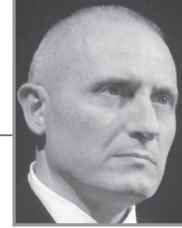


RETURN TO COMPETITIVE SPORTS: SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE

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The time to return to play and the ability to continue sport activity with time are two important outcomes after Anterior Cruciate Ligament (ACL) reconstruction, especially in young sportsmen. Nevertheless no consensus is available regarding the optimal rehabilitation length and the return to play definition. These issues are more controversial when considering the outcomes related to single sports. When evaluating sport-specific outcomes after ACL reconstruction, only three studies presented the results in soccer players. This lack is important because identifying sport-specific differences in ACL reconstruction outcomes in athletes could lead to more effective rehabilitation programs for all these athletes after surgery, providing orthopedic surgeons the ability to accurately inform patients about what they should plan to expect after surgery in terms of performance level and timing of return to sport.

Furthermore, different interpretations have been attributed to the "return to sport" outcome, ranging from return to perform sportspecific gestures, restore pre-injury activity level, return to train or return to official match. Often, the precise definition is not even reported.

Regarding general population, return to sport could be obtained at a mean of 7 months after ACL reconstruction in 82% of cases, at pre-injury level in 63% and at competitive level in 44%.

When dealing with competitive high demanding activities like soccer, high motivation, availability of well trained staff and high level facilities could improve the rates of return to sport to 94-71% as reported for American collegiate, UEFA or Italian Leagues soccer players.

However, a general decrease in the ability to continue soccer career at same pre-injury level is reported, thus underlining the catastrophic effect of ACL injury in competitive athlete life and career.