

MONITORING PLAYER LOAD: SEPARATING THE FACTS FROM THE MYTH

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In today's elite team sporting environment, monitoring player training load and fatigue levels has become a crucial role of the Sports Science and Sports Medicine (Sports Medicine) department. The ability of a department to estimate and identify individual player fatigue levels within a team setting may well lead to reduced injury levels as well as optimal performance. The term 'monitoring' in this context, however, has been used to describe a variety of procedures and assessments, some of which have questionable evidence to support their use.

It remains important for Sports Medicine Departments to identify appropriate monitoring techniques specifically for their team based on criteria such as:

1. Appropriate supporting evidence, either in the peer-reviewed literature or evidence developed on site.
2. Ability to deliver useable outcomes.
3. Cost of implementation.
4. Applicability of the procedure to the environment. This player and coaching/management buy-in.

Practitioners ought to divide monitoring practices into external and internally based procedures. Internal monitoring is the estimation of the cost of the load imposed on the player. Player Heart Rate (HR) and Rate of Perceived Exertion (RPE) might be examples of this type of monitoring. External monitoring is the tracking of loads that the player actually produces. Player distance travelled or number of accelerations are examples of external monitoring values.

Defining procedures as either internal or external will not only assist in the diagnosis of fatigue source but it also may prevent an imbalance of monitoring one particular area.