

Pitch Side Physio



What is required?

What is the GAA POLICY?

I watched with great delight recently, a well known Sunday evening highlights programme. During the analysis section, the panellists asked questions on a certain topic before showing clips of incidents, displaying some of the confusion that exists.

The topic in question is 'What is the GAA's policy on injuries occurring during a game?' This is a frustrating problem I have had first hand experience of over the last couple of years, through my direct experience with regular incidents as physiotherapist to the Down Senior Footballers.

The real problem is, **no policy exists.** In the past when a player went down injured the referee would stop the game and allow the medical staff to enter the field of play. The referee would then allow time for the player to be assessed and minor treatment to be administered eg. Small wound dressing or thumb taping.

For any additional treatment necessary the player was escorted from the field (if further treatment is necessary, he/she is most likely unable to play-on anyway!) If the player required a stretcher for removal from the field then the game was not restarted until the player was off the field of play.

What is happening at present is much different. Firstly, play is not necessarily halted by the referee, so the medical staff are forced to take it into their own hands and decide whether to enter the field or not. In this year's competition, this course of action will more than likely incur a fine to the club! The game is not stopped until a break in play occurs. When the referee arrives on the scene the first words have been (in my experience this season) '*you may get that man*

off the field!'

The role of the pitch-side physio can be simplified into 2 parts; Assessment of a player's ability to continue in the game.

Administer Treatment

If a player is to be removed from the field of play, the physio must decide on the level of assistance required by that player, based on the extent of his/her injury. Therefore assessment of the injury must take place first. This takes time!

Treatment is generally in the form of basic first aid or maybe some form of taping or strapping which, in the hands of an experienced physio, can be administered quickly. For anything more prolonged then the player should be removed from the field, although as I said earlier, if significant treatment is required, then the chances are the player shouldn't be returning to play anyway.

The faults with the present system are:

Referees putting undue pressure on the medical team for removal of an unstable player from the field

Continuation of play, putting the injured player at risk of further injury – including the medical staff!

A team at a distinct advantage due to an injured player on the field.

At present it seems the severity of the injury is judged by the referee. This is not a good position for either the player or the referee to be in! While no one wants to see a stop/start game or a team who attain an advantage by play-acting, a policy for handling of injuries during a game is necessary and must be applied consistently. This is a topic for discussion between the referees committee and the medical and player welfare committee. We can't have rogue referees who 'like to let the game flow' risking serious injuries to players.

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