

AN ASSESSMENT OF BASKETBALL INJURIES IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Basketball is, theoretically, a no-contact game, but it has been established that personal contact cannot be avoided entirely when 10 players are moving with great speed over a limited space. Due to this obvious contact, high tempers and friction, so many injuries have occurred during games, which have led to loss of playing time as well as physical and psychological consequences. This study investigated the aetiology and time course of the injuries in both male and female basketball players during the first phase of the 1997 National Basketball Classic League, in order to detect a substantial typology of sports injuries and offer special programmes for their prevention. Results indicated that the main aetiological factors were the opponent, the floor and type of shoes. Most of the injuries occurred during pressure defences and inside plays. No major difference was found in the pattern of injuries between the male and female players. Based on results of this study, it will seem that the number and severity of injuries in basketball could be minimised, if the rules and mechanics of officiating pressure defences, charged/block and inside-plays are amended.

Key words: Basketball, injuries, contact, mechanics.

INTRODUCTION

When Dr. James Naismith invented basketball in 1891, it was meant to be a non-contact game. This was evident in his first thirteen rules of the game published in the Triangles magazine on 15 January 1892 under the title: 'A New Game' (FIBA, 1996). Rule No. 5 stated thus:

"No shouldering, holding, pushing, tripping, or striking, in any way the person of an opponent shall be allowed, the first infringement of this rule by any person shall count as a foul, the second shall disqualify him until the next goal is made, or if there was evident intent to *injuries* to the person for the whole game, no substitute allowed."

So Naismith wanted a game people could enjoy, with no contact and injury, but with the evolution of basketball over the years, it has become clear that the non-contact rule is merely theoretical. In fact, it has been established that personal contact cannot be avoided entirely when ten players are moving with great rapidity over a limited space (FIBA, 1994).

This obvious physical contact, coupled with high tempers and friction during play, has led to the occurrence of so many injuries over the years, which has led to loss of time from the sport as well as physical and psychological consequences (McLatchie, 1993), like disfigurement of body parts, and the fear of an early exit from the game (Uitenbroek, 1996).

The Kenya Basketball Federation runs a basketball classic league, which is an avenue for all top male and female teams to play in a league system every weekend. Injuries have been noticed in some of these games, which caused the player's loss of playing times as well as medical bills incurred by team owners.

These injuries are not documented, anywhere. If well document, such injuries could be studied and measures for prevention or minimising their occurrence suggested. This study was carried out to provide an insight into the aetiology and time course of injuries in both male and female basketball players during the first phase of the 1997 National Basketball Classic League Division 1, in order to detect a typology of sports injuries and offer special programmes for their prevention.

METHODS

An Injury-Report-Sheet (IRS) designed by the author was used for the collection of data based on the 66 male and 28 female matches played during the first phase of the league.

Results

A total of 31 injuries to males and 12 injuries to females were recorded during the period. The type of injuries observed are shown in table 1.

	MA LE		FEMALE	
	N	%	N	%
Finger dislocations	8	25.8	3	25.0
Ankle sprains	3	9.7	2	16.7
Incisions	18	58.0	6	50.0
Knee joint distortions	2	6.5	1	8.3
Total	31	100	12	100

Over half of the injuries observed (58% for men and 50% for the women) were incisions which came from elbows during inside plays and pressure defence situations. Finger dislocations accounted for the next higher type of injuries

occurring during pressure defences and block situations (25.8% for men and 25% for women). Ankle sprains and knee joints distortions accounted for less than half of the total injuries in both males and females.

Table 2: Aetiological factors of Injuries

AETIOLOGICAL FACTOR	MALE		FEMALE	
	N	%	N	%
Opponent	26	83.9	9	75.0
Floor	1	3.2	0	0
Type of shoes	4	12.9	3	25.0
Total	31	100	12	100

Table 2 shows the aetiological factors of the injuries observed. The main aetiological factor was the opponent, which accounted for 83.9 % of the injuries in the males and 75 % in the females. This result buttresses the amount of contact being experienced on the court of play during a game of basketball. Type of shoes and the floor accounted for less than a half of the total injuries during the period. In fact, it should be noted that the only injury resulting from the floor was when the court was wet after a heavy downpour during one of the men's matches.

DISCUSSION

This study shows that incisions and finger dislocations are the most prevalent types of injuries during basketball matches. The prevalent causes of the injuries have been shown to be the opponent. Of interest here is the fact that most of the injuries occurred during defences, charging/block situations and inside-plays. It is therefore pertinent to look at these aspects of the game, in relation to the occurrence of injuries.

Pressure Defences

The object of basketball apart from trying to put the ball into the opponents' basket is to try to stop the opponent from securing the ball or scoring. Teams have effectively done the latter through pressure defences, which involves putting pressure (playing close) on the opposing team through playing a man-to-man or zone defence. In order to get the ball from the opposing team, players on pressure defence have had to use their body as implements for stopping the opponent/ball by hitting, pushing or even tripping (Blasone,

1996). This has led to a lot of contact, which obviously result into injuries as shown in this study.

Charge/Block Situations

FIBA (1994) defines charging as personal contact with or without the ball by pushing or moving into an opponent's torso, while blocking is personal contact, which impedes the progress of an opponent. This ordinarily looks straight forward, but when referees try to judge the situation, it poses a dilemma, because the move happens very quickly. When they are not correctly judged, there is a chain of reaction, which leads to injuries occurring either through the force of the drive and its impact on the torso or a twist of the ankle or knee to avoid the charge

Inside Plays

The inside position on the basketball court is that part of the court from the free-throw line to the baseline usually referred to as the restricted area. Lorenzo (1996) has observed that because of the closeness to the rim, most of the shots in a basketball game are made in that area, apart from other activities like offensive and defensive rebounding. Due to the importance of this particular area on the court, players normally fight for an ideal position in that area. In doing this, several contacts occur, which lead to injuries. This is further compounded by the fact that today's basketball players are big and fast moving with intense pace during the game. All these factors combined, put the players in a precarious position, especially during contact that becomes violent. Therefore, most of the points and injuries as noted by Akpata (1996) occur during inside plays in the restricted area.

Special Programme for the Prevention of Basketball Injuries

1. Mechanics of officiating pressure defences. The mechanics of officiating is a system designed as a practical working method to facilitate the task of the referees on the court (FIBA, 1994). The intention is to help referees obtain the best possible position, enabling decisions on infraction of the rules to be made as correctly as possible. Pressure defences create difficulty for the officials, no doubt, but the 5-second rule during a trap defence must be judged correctly. Rather than looking out for the violation of the rules, the mechanics should require the officials to look out for proximity of players involved and the contact. The golden rule should therefore, be a space between players during trap/pressure defence situations if there is no space, then contact has occurred. In this way, officials can terminate the sequence of events before it leads to contact and consequently injuries.

2. The rules and mechanics of judging hand checks should also be amended, in order to prevent injuries such as finger dislocations. Presently, the rule states that in defending a player dribbling the ball, any contact that occurs to the dribbler's wrist up to his fingers is legal, as the palm touching the ball is regarded as part of the ball. Thus most defenders have tried to play the ball by hitting very hard, thereby dislocating the fingers.
3. Mechanics of judging the charge/block situation needs to be amended in order to prevent a lot of injuries during a game. Due to the fact that for a charge foul to be valid, contact must be on the torso, players normally come with such force, as to prevent the charge. Defenders willing to take the charge are now forced to receive the whole impact of the weight, size and speed of the offensive player thereby resulting in most injuries.
4. The inside play accounts for most of the injuries, especially incisions where players use their elbows as tools for inflicting injuries. The present mechanics that allows "fight" for position promotes the idea that they could use rough tactics including their knees and elbows in order to edge out the opponent and gain possession of the ball. A better mechanics would be to use the maxim "He who is there first has a right to the position". This will reduce the struggle for position and hopefully injuries in the restricted areas.
5. All players should be encouraged to use the ideal basketball shoes during practice and game situation. The ideal basketball shoes are those that grip the ankle properly since basketball involves a lot of footwork. Such ankle-high shoes help to reduce injuries to the ankles due to twist, especially when in traffic on the court or during pivoting.
6. Basketball courts should always be cleaned and mopped dry and clean before allowing players to use them. This will help to prevent injuries resulting from slipping or falling.

CONCLUSION

Basketball is a competitive game that is characterised by heightened tension and emotion. Also tempers and friction may run high especially when scores are close. It is therefore difficult, if not impossible to avoid contact under such situations. With contact comes injuries, which have been discovered to be caused prevalently by the opponent and occurring mostly during some phases of the game. If the mechanics of officiating these phases are amended, the likelihood is that injuries could be minimised. Since the mechanics rest on the officials, it is time for FIBA to consider

increasing the number of referees to three. It should be pointed out that the amateur league, is the only league in the world where two referees officiate. With three handling a game, such contact situations that may lead to injuries can be avoided by the referees working in concert.

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