CHAPTER 14: RISK OF INJURY IN YOUTH SPORTS - role of psychological factors

Anthony P Kontos

Questions to consider?

- What are the risks of injury in youth sports?
- How do psychological factors affect the risk of injury among youth sport participants?
- How do other factors interact with psychological factors to influence the injury process?

INTRODUCTION

John is a 13 year-old youth soccer player who currently has a mild ankle sprain. This is his third injury during the past month. Previously, he incurred a contusion during a tackle of an opponent, and before that, he had a mild concussion after a collision with an opposing goalkeeper. John’s coaches and parents are concerned about John’s propensity to be injured. Why does John continue to be injured? Do his behaviors and thoughts influence the likelihood of him being injured? Are John’s stress and anxiety levels affecting the likelihood that he is injured? Or is it that there are certain youth sport participants who, like John, have a certain set of personality characteristics that make them more likely than others to be injured?

Many of us would agree, anecdotally, that this last statement has some merit, as we all know athletes like John who seem to be injured more often than other athletes. However, the notion of an ‘injury prone’ (Lysens et al., 1989; Taerk, 1977) athlete or personality has not been supported empirically (see Personality section). Injury involves a multidimensional process influenced by a myriad of factors; among them, life stress, competitive anxiety, social support and other psychological factors. During the last decade, researchers and practitioners alike have focused considerable efforts toward understanding the psychological factors affecting the injury process in sport (Williams and Andersen, 1998). Most of these studies have focused on adult sport participants, at the exclusion of youth sport participants. As a result, much of