Preface

The Initial Evaluation and Treatment of Facial Injuries in Athletes

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Editor

*The **face** is the **most exposed body part** for athletes competing in many different sports.*

—Michael J. Stuart, MD

My greatest trepidation as a team physician who covers sporting events is the diagnosis and management of injuries to the cervical spine, brain, larynx, eye, and face. Sport-related facial injuries are common, representing approximately 40% of emergency department visits. The high-risk sports vary according to country, level of participation, and the use of facial protection. Fortunately, most of these injuries are mild, but some result in serious functional or cosmetic deficits. Facial trauma in sports may have significant consequences for both the individual and society.

We must all remember that prevention is the key. There is strong evidence to support the effectiveness of protective equipment and rule changes. For example, the use of full facial protection in the sport of ice hockey has virtually eliminated eye injuries. Missing legislation, noncompliance, and lack of enforcement can lead to significant risks to athletes in many sports, including permanent blindness.

Facial injuries in sports are caused by blunt, penetrating, or perforating mechanisms. The initial evaluation of an athlete with facial trauma begins with a focused assessment of the athlete's airway, breathing, and cervical spine. Resuscitative efforts are paramount, followed by a secondary evaluation for associated injuries to the brain, eye, and face.

Mouth guards are effective for decreasing the risk of oral trauma. Athletes should be encouraged to wear a custom-fit device for comfort, breathability, and optimal protection. Although there is no current scientific evidence to prove that mouth guards

prevent concussion or enhance performance, they should be worn with the goal of preventing dental injuries. In addition, a mouth guard may help stabilize the jaw and dissipate impact forces to the brain.

This special issue has been developed to provide a knowledge base for sports medicine providers so they can effectively recognize facial injuries, perform basic resuscitation, provide initial treatment, and refer to the appropriate specialist as indicated. Each of the expert authors offers a concise review along with practical tips that will help you promote safety, prevent catastrophic consequences, and ensure optimal results for your athletes.

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