Concussion in rugby has always been an issue and has happened frequently since the game started. It has been the culture of rugby that a player who gets knocked out or gets a bang should just “man up” or “run it off”.

Concussion is a very serious injury and should always be dealt with properly, the days where the above statements are long gone and now a concussion is seen as one of the most dangerous impact injuries to happen in our game. I am writing this to help all club coaches and club parents recognise concussion signs and how the policy of “return to play” works that Scottish rugby use.

A player can suffer concussion without being knocked out and can even get concussion from a heavy hit to the body which makes their head move in a wipe lash like motion. The key signs of concussion are below, if you recognise 2/3 of these signs in a player on the pitch or trainin paddock remove them from play ASAP.

* Confusion (being unaware of surroundings, a delay in answering questions or having a blank expression)
* Headache
* Dizziness
* Nausea
* Loss of balance
* Feeling stunned or dazed
* Disturbance with vision
* Difficulties with memory (forgetting score, who scored last, date, opponents, KO time etc)
* Loss of consciousness
* Slurred speech
* Changes in behaviour
* Lack of concentration
* Vomiting

Players who get removed from play should not take any chances and get checked by a Doctor, first aider or GP As soon as possible. They will diagnose if a player does have concussion or does not have very quickly, I must stress that concussion can be delayed so please make sure an eye is kept on the player for at least 24 hours and if the player goes to bed as normal i would suggest disturbing him/her a couple of times during the night to check there is no signs of concussion.

If a player gets diagnosed with concussion the club use the “return to play” policy below, make sure each step is taken properly and get assessed a couple of times during the procedure by a professional. If a player gets to stage 2 for example and signs start again then that player will remain on stage for until no signs are present. After this then the player can move on.

Stage 1- day 1-14: get diagnosed ASAP by a professional, if concussed no strenuous exercise or any physically straining movement should be undertaken for 14 days minimum.

Stage 2- Day 14-17: get assessed again by a professional, if all is okay start to go for general exercises like swimming, bike ride, walking, jogging etc.

Stage 3- day 17-19: if there is no sign of concussion, returning to training is possible, can do everything except contact training even against bags is a NO go.

Stage 4- day 19-20: if no signs are present after heavy exercise then contact training can be looked at, if a player can perform consistent tackles, rucks, etc with no signs of concussion then the player should seek a letter of approval from a professional to prove that player can compete again in games.

During the above process communication from players, parents, coaches and school teachers are key to a safe return, if the player is concussed PE staff must be aware so allow the player to sit out.

I am fully aware players at all ages do not realise the danger of concussion or taking a head knock, it’s our duty of care to re-enforce to players that they must tell us if they got a heavy head knock or feel ill/dizzy etc as worst case scenario death can be the result if not addressed and returned properly, players need to know that if addressed and returned properly they are in safe hands at our club.

Thank you,

James Sadio

Mackie Development officer.