

OTTAWA PACERS SPEED SKATING CLUB



Concussion Policy

Final

Approved:

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Ottawa Pacers Concussion Protocol

Background

We are passionate about speed skating because we want our kids to reach their full potential. Part of that potential is proactively managing their health and safety. We are learning more and more about the impact of concussions on youth in sports – of their severity and of their lasting impact, especially with regards to multiple concussions.

“Concussion is a brain injury and is defined as a complex pathophysiological process affecting the brain, induced by biomechanical forces. Several common features that incorporate clinical, pathologic and biomechanical injury constructs that may be utilized in defining the nature of a concussive head injury include:

- *Concussion may be caused either by a direct blow to the head, face, neck or elsewhere on the body with an “impulsive” force transmitted to the head.*
- *Concussion typically results in the rapid onset of short-lived impairment of neurological function that resolves spontaneously. However, in some cases, symptoms and signs may evolve over a number of minutes to hours.*
- *Concussion may result in neuropathological changes, but the acute clinical symptoms largely reflect a functional disturbance rather than a structural injury and, as such, no abnormality is seen on standard structural neuroimaging studies.*
- *Concussion results in a graded set of clinical symptoms that may or may not involve loss of consciousness. Resolution of the clinical and cognitive symptoms typically follows a sequential course. However, it is important to note that in some cases symptoms may be prolonged.”¹*

Research indicates that there are millions of concussions in North America each year, and that the number of concussions occurring yearly is thought to be on the rise. In addition, in the case of sports-related concussions, if one returns to play before being fully recovered from a concussion, it is easier to obtain another concussion and the repeat concussion is likely to be more significant.²

Identifying concussions is sometimes hard in youth. This can be more difficult in younger children because they either don't want to stop their activity, or they have a hard time verbalizing exactly how

¹ McCrory P, Meeuwisse W, Johnston K, et al. Consensus statement on concussion in sport: the 3rd International Conference on Concussion in Sport held in Zurich, November 2012. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, 2013; 47:250-258.

² Consensus Statement on Concussion in Sport, Zurich, November 2012

they feel. In 2013, Ottawa teen Rowan Stringer died as a result of suffering multiple concussions while playing rugby. She didn't tell her parents that she was already experiencing concussion symptoms, and so she continued to play, suffering another, fatal concussion. A coroner's report into her death found a lack of protocol when it came to addressing concussion management in youth sports. There were 49 recommendations made concerning everything from head injury awareness and prevention, as well as removal-from-play and return-to-play strategies for young athletes, coaches and mentors. As a result of this report, Rowan's Law was created - a legislative committee aimed at addressing these recommendations and increasing awareness.

In this regard, the Ottawa Pacers Board feels that it is important for the Ottawa Pacers to adopt a formal policy regarding concussion management in order to encourage awareness, and emphasize the importance of safety for all our skaters. This will also help clarify the process that must be followed in the case of a suspected concussion. This policy will take into account the following CHEO guidelines:

- If there is any concern that a child may have suffered a concussion, they are to be immediately pulled from the activity and reassessed prior to returning to the sport.
- The brain is still vulnerable to "repeat injury" even after symptoms have resolved. Therefore it is important to follow official "Return to Play Guidelines" when attempting to return back to sport.

Disclaimer: This document is not intended to replace seeking help from a trained medical professional with adequate concussion expertise.

Ottawa Pacers Concussion Policy

PURPOSE

Ottawa Pacers is committed to maintaining the health of its athletes and believes that an athlete's health is more important than participating in the sport of speed skating. Ottawa Pacers recognizes the increased awareness of concussions and their long-term effects, and Ottawa Pacers therefore enacts this Policy as a tool to help manage concussed and possibly-concussed athletes and preserve the health of its members.

SCOPE

This Policy applies to all athletes, coaches, officials, members and decision-makers of the Ottawa Pacers.

ADHERENCE

Ottawa Pacers adopts and adheres to Speed Skating Canada's Return to Play Procedure which includes both the Return to Speed Skating Protocol and concussion guidelines. Although the existing Ottawa Pacer Concussion Policy contains specific elements of information that were considered current as of the development of this policy (November, 2016), the Ottawa Pacers acknowledges that the most current emerging research may add to or replace the guidelines presented herein. Therefore, this document will be reviewed and updated as appropriate on an annual basis by the Board members prior to the AGM.

PROCEDURE

1. All coaches will now be required to complete training for the Sport Concussion Assessment Tool (SCAT) in order for them to have a better understanding of concussion symptoms. The link for this tool may be found on the Speed Skating Canada website. Symptoms of a concussion include, but are not limited to:
 - i. Nausea
 - ii. Poor concentration
 - iii. Amnesia
 - iv. Fatigue
 - v. Sensitivity to light or noise
 - vi. Irritability
 - vii. Poor appetite
 - viii. Decreased memory

The current SCAT tool used for athletes over 12 years of age is the SCAT3 and the CHILD SCAT3 is used to assess athletes 12 and under. Any new coaches will be required to be trained within one month of the start of the season. On-ice help are encouraged to receive the training as well. The Technical Director is responsible to ensure all coaches receive the required training.

2. During all speed skating events, competitions, and practices sanctioned by Ottawa Pacers, participants (which include coaches, athletes, officials, and other members) will use their best efforts to:
 - a) Be aware of incidents that may cause a concussion, such as:
 - i. Falls
 - ii. Accidents
 - iii. Collisions

iv. Head trauma

- b) Any athlete or other individual who has been involved in any of the above incidents and/or exhibit any of the above symptoms must be assessed. It will be the responsibility of the coach to use the Sport Concussion Assessment Tools (SCAT) in order to first assess the skater. If there is any doubt as to whether a concussion has occurred, it is to be assumed that it has. Blank SCAT forms will be kept in the Sensplex storage room.
3. Athletes or other individuals who have been involved in an incident that may cause a concussion and who may exhibit symptoms of a concussion shall be removed from the speed skating activity.
 4. Following the athlete being removed from the speed skating activity, the athlete's coach or other individual in charge of the athlete (if the athlete is a minor) or someone familiar to the athlete should:
 - a) Call an emergency number (if the situation appears serious)
 - b) Notify the athlete's parent (if the athlete is a minor) or someone close to the athlete (if the athlete is not a minor)
 - c) Have a ride home for the athlete arranged, and ensure they will not be left alone at home
 - d) Isolate the athlete into a dark room or area
 - e) Reduce external stimulus (noise, other people, etc)
 - f) Remain with the athlete until he or she can be taken home (again ensure that they will not be alone once they are home. If a Master skater is assessed as potentially having a concussion and lives alone, they are to be taken to the hospital.)
 - g) Encourage the consultation of a physician (note that the athlete must have clearance from a physician in order to return to the ice)
 5. Once the athlete's immediate needs have been met, the athlete's family or the athlete should be directed to Speed Skating Canada's Return to Play Procedure.

RETURN TO SPEED SKATING

Although everyone's concussion symptoms and recovery time are different, returning to normal activities after a concussion must be done in a step-wise process. Accordingly, an athlete who has been concussed is expected to follow the steps outlined in SSC's Return to Speed Skating Protocol before returning to practice with physician clearance to do so. An excerpt is provided below; the full reference is available at: <http://www.speedskating.ca/concussions-brain-injuries>

- STEP 1: Complete cognitive and physical rest.** Limit school, work and tasks requiring concentration. Refrain from physical activity until symptoms are gone. Once all symptoms are gone, rest for at least another 24-48 hours and consult a physician, preferably one with experience managing concussion, for clearance to proceed to Step 2.

- STEP 2:** **Light aerobic exercise** to reintroduce physical activity: e.g.10-15 minutes of low intensity cycling on a stationary bike.
- STEP 3:** 30 minutes of cycling on a stationary bike at 75% of Max Heart Rate.
- STEP 4:** 30 minutes of cycling on a stationary bike at 75% of Max Heart Rate with 30 second maximum effort intervals at minutes 10, 15, and 20.
- STEP 5:** **Sport-specific aerobic activity and re-introduction of skating: 15 minutes of low intensity skating.** The environment should be managed so as to ensure the athlete is not in excessive traffic and that there is minimum risk of falling or colliding with other athletes. The athlete may also attempt basic balance drills, such as gliding in basic position on one leg. If the athlete only has access to a short track facility, he or she should skate around the outside, close to the boards with no traffic on the inside. It will be the coach's discretion whether the athlete is allowed to perform this Step during a regular practice session, or if it has to be done at another time.
- STEP 6:** 30 minutes of skating at 75% of Max Heart Rate with 30 second maximum effort intervals at minutes 10, 15, and 20.
- STEP 7:** Regular off-ice warm-up with high intensity off-ice agility/coordination activities and monitored high intensity off-ice and on-ice workout.
- STEP 8:** **Full on-ice practice**, including skating in traffic, tactical drills, starts and race simulations **once cleared by a physician.** Note that the physician who provides clearance at this point does not need to be the physician who diagnosed the original concussion, but does need to be aware of the nature and circumstances of the concussion.
- STEP 9:** **Return to unrestricted training and competition**

MEDICAL CLEARANCE

Speed Skating Canada's Return to Speed Skating Protocol requires the athlete to consult with a physician at two stages: a) before returning to light aerobic exercise, and b) before resuming full on-ice practice.

Ottawa Pacers agrees with Speed Skating Canada's Return to Speed Skating Protocol and will require the athlete to obtain medical clearance, ideally from a physician familiar with concussions, before permitting the athlete to resume speed skating activity with the club. Medical clearance must be formally written by the physician, and a copy of the clearance must be given to the athlete's coach before Step 2 and Step 5. The coach will give the medical clearance to the Technical Director, who will be responsible for keeping all medical clearance forms. The Technical Director will also be responsible for communicating to coaches and all of the on-ice help that the athlete is returning from a concussion and therefore care must be taken to ensure they have a healthy transition back to skating.