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**PRESS RELEASE**

**30 July 2018**

**Half of Super Rugby team players can expect to get injured in a season**

A study recently published in the British Journal of Sports Medicine, and led by Prof Martin Schwellnus, Director of the University of Pretoria’s (UP) Sport, Exercise Medicine and Lifestyle Institute (SEMLI), followed 482 players over five Super Rugby seasons during training and match time, recording the injuries that occurred during a total of 93 641 player-hours.

The study, the largest conducted to date in this tournament, revealed that there is a considerably higher match injury incidence in South African Super Rugby teams, where each team can expect to have two injuries occur per match.  About 50 percent of all players can expect to suffer a time loss injury each season, which prevents the player from playing in matches or training for more than one day.  Almost a third of players can expect to have an injury resulting in eight or more days off from training/match play, and one in eight players will sustain a severe injury that puts them out for more than 28 days.

Rugby union is a contact sport involving frequent high-impact collisions. As a result, it has one of the highest rates of injury incidence among team sports.  This years’ Super Rugby tournament is testament to this with such recent headlines as the injury crisis in the Bulls and Lions teams, and key Springbok players not able to participate in important games this year.

World Rugby, the international governing body for rugby union, periodically introduces changes to the laws of the game to enhance the playing and spectator experience and improve player welfare. Such law changes likely alter team strategy and player demands and may affect injury patterns over time. There is therefore a need to conduct research studies over a number of seasons in order to analyse changes in injury profiles.

The results from the five year study led by SEMLI researchers revealed a total of 936 time loss injuries, of which, understandably, the vast majority (85.7 percent) occurred during matches and 14.3 percent occurred during training – a 62 times higher chance of getting injured in matches than during training.  Most of these match injuries occurred in contact situations, with more than half of all injuries occurring during a tackle specifically.

Over the five years of the study, eight percent of players suffered a minimal injury, 12 percent suffered mild injury, 17 percent suffered a moderate injury and 12 percent suffered a severe injury resulting in at least 28 days of time loss.  50 percent of all the match injuries occurred in players’ legs (mostly in the thigh and knee), followed by the arms/shoulders (mostly the shoulder/clavicle). Less common were head/neck injuries (16 percent) and injuries to the trunk (11 percent).

The possible causes of injury are varied and complex, and could include conditioning levels, injury prevention and management procedures, or the travel demands during a tournament. Nevertheless, alarming statistics such as these call for the development of evidence-based, targeted interventions and guidelines for injury risk reduction (such as rule changes or the modification of players’ technique), since the effect of injury on player performance, health and career advancement, not to mention overall team performance can be devastating.

Prof Martin Schwellnus and his research team at UP’s Sport, Exercise Medicine and Lifestyle Institute (SEMLI), in collaboration with SARU and the medical doctors of the South African Super Rugby teams have already started designing, implementing and testing these vitally important injury prevention programmes.

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