

Doctor Football

Backroom staff play a pivotal role in any football organisation and with the increasing demands of the modern game, doctors are highly sought after and traded in a similar fashion to star players. Terry Cornick speaks to Associate Professor Shane Brun, of James Cook University, about what it takes to be a professional sports doctor.

Dr Shane Brun has worked for the FFA and is now an Asian Football Confederation elite panel member and a FIFA medical officer. He shares his experience and advice below.

Where has the job taken you?

As an FFA doctor you meet up with the team at training camps as well as travel with the squad to tournaments. It is probably better to answer where I haven't been! My current role with the AFC means the geographical responsibility is huge.

How did you get into it?

By way of recommendation, application, being vetted, training, passing training and being accepted. There is ongoing training and recertification that must be undertaken annually.

What do you enjoy about the job?

The international involvement is fantastic. Being involved with fantastic organisations such as the AFC and FIFA is a great privilege. It is now accepted that medical input into elite sport is essential if an athlete or team is going to make it on the world stage. Working with people who have a common interest as well as working with colleagues from all over the world is an eye opener.

What do you find challenging?

When caring for footballers you don't just have the responsibility of one patient — you have the responsibility of the patient, the team and the coach. Any medical decision you make has the potential to make a huge impact

on the team and whether they win or lose a game, a tournament or a World Cup. The good thing about dealing with athletes is their motivation to get better; unlike many patients, athletes want to be better today not tomorrow and their coach wants them better yesterday.

In your opinion, why does Australia seem to produce so many good doctors?

The nation has an exceptional reputation in sports medicine. For many years our doctors, physiotherapists, dietitians and exercise scientists have been amongst the world leaders

in this field. Australia has a sporting mentality and this spreads over into our work. It's interesting that if a doctor works in general practice or in an emergency department, as much as 25 per cent of the patients they see will present musculoskeletal problems, many sports related. Unfortunately, less than 5 per cent of undergraduate medical education focuses on musculoskeletal medicine and most of that has a surgical focus. Fortunately, this trend is changing and more emphasis is now being placed on this area rather than surgical management and injury prevention.



Associate Professor Dr Shane Brun specialises in adolescent sports medicine.

Dr Brun advises to go beyond static stretches when warming up.





DR BRUN'S TOP TIPS FOR AVOIDING INJURIES

Being a contact sport, football injuries are common, although the majority are reasonably minor. As Dr Brun explains, most affect the ankle and knee and muscles of the thigh and calf. Sprains and strains are the most common reason for players to miss training or games. So how does a footballer stay out of the treatment room or off the dreaded surgeon's table?

1. SEE AN EXPERT

No matter how 'minor' you think the injury is, you should always have it assessed by a physiotherapist or doctor trained in sports medicine, only time will provide a sub-optimal result. Often the rehabilitation program will be simple and you will be able to perform it at home or the gym, so don't think it will necessarily be lengthy or expensive.

2. WARM-UP, COOL-DOWN

Warm-ups and cool-downs are an essential part of injury prevention. The middle-aged amateur footballer does a "quick warm-up" with a menthol-based muscle liniment and a stretch before sprinting onto the field. From the perspective of injury prevention, creams have absolutely no benefit, they are irritants, distracting attention from the underlying discomfort and only

penetrate several millimetres, which can't reach most muscles. In fact, they may increase injuries.

3. PRE-GAME PREPARATION

Static stretching may also be a waste of time. At the elite levels of sport, players now perform movements they would normally perform on the field with more exaggerated

movements. Keep warm by performing a gradually increasing intensity, physical activity 10 minutes before a game or training and decreasing after the game, letting muscles prepare or recover in a way they find more acceptable. Look up The 11+, a program developed by FIFA Medical Assessment and Research Centre (F-MARC).

4. HYDRATION

Being 2 per cent dehydrated will impact your performance, concentration and coordination, over 3 per cent and it gets serious. Prior to training or your game, weigh yourself in your underwear, then train or play. Drink as you normally would then weigh yourself again in your underwear. A 1 per cent drop or gain is normal, doubling or tripling this is worrying, remembering that 100 grams equals 100ml of fluid. Calculate the perfect intake for your weight, with a bit of practice you'll have it right. Sports drinks are only effective after an hour of activity, water is fine until then. 

Remember to stretch when cooling down.

