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IMPROVE YOUR...

**– MENTAL STRENGTH
DURING INJURY
AND RECOVERY**

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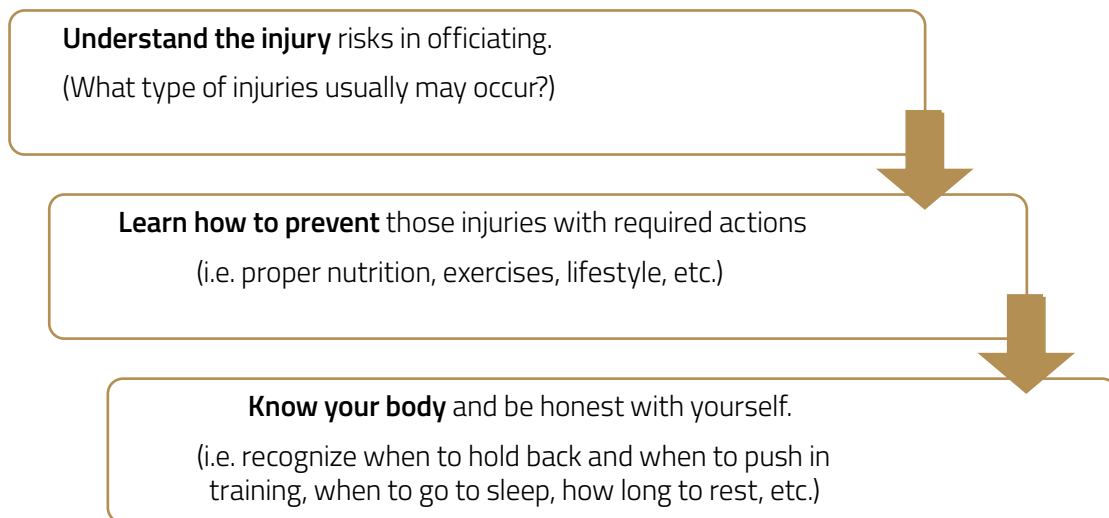
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IMPROVE YOUR...

MENTAL STRENGTH DURING INJURY AND RECOVERY

Injury is something that many referees don't like to talk about for the fear that acknowledging the very real risk of an injury during their career will make it more likely to occur. However, one of the worst things that you can do is to not prepare yourself for this possibility, because many of you already have had or will experience some kind of injury. It can put you out of the court just for a day or few, but sometimes can take you out for a few months or even longer. The more you become aware of the possibility of injuries, the better you'll be prepared for their prevention.

Here are the basic principles of injury prevention:



While accidental injuries do occur, the vast majority of sports injuries can be traced back to a failure to these three basic principles. Think of when you were injured, and what had led to your injury (i.e. overtraining, bad preparation, inadequate lifestyle, short rest time, etc.).

Depending on the severity of injuries **you may require assistance** by different professionals (medical, physical, psychological) to ensure an appropriate healing and recovery process. Since we are talking about the psychological view of rehabilitation, the big part is **controlling what you can control** and trying to minimize anxiety about uncontrollable factors. Here is the plan that provides you with the tips how you can address the challenge. Apply the steps individually and take action.

1. LEARN ABOUT YOUR INJURY AND RECOVERY PROCESS

Learn about your injury, its cause, the healing process, and what it will look like when it is healed. Proactive education about injury and rehabilitation is the cornerstone of a successful recovery. Understanding "how" the injury happened, "what" and "why" is necessary during the rehabilitation. It empowers you and gives you a sense of controllability of the whole process.

2. GOAL-SETTING

Realistic short-term and mid-term goals guide you through a day-to-day and step-by-step process of rehabilitation. It gives you the motivation to focus on the right things, at the right time, in the right way. The challenge of rehabilitation demands a consistent, task-oriented focus through the whole process of rehabilitation. The better your goals are set - realistically and under control, the more successful will be your recovery.

3. MENTAL TOUGHNESS

The ability to remain positive, determined and focused when you are tired, in pain, and discouraged is mental toughness. Overcoming inevitable obstacles and challenges during your recovery process demands you to be focused on what you can control – your thoughts, emotions, and actions (behaviour). Overcoming and changing negative emotions, such as fear, frustration, anger and despair with positive and affirmative ones, such as optimism and hope could be essential for your rehabilitation.

EXERCISE 1: TAKE ACTION

Find something you can think about (rather than not to think about your injury). Find your motivation for your areas of improvement – i.e. daily tasks, reading the rule book, doing different video analysis, etc.

- Set daily goals and a check list for each task you need to complete during your day-to-day therapy. Write down your progress and evaluate each new step.
- Every day take 45 minutes to go through the rule book and recall the rules' applications with the images from the court and/or video clips.
- On weekends, while your colleagues officiate, watch some live games and make an analysis from the educational point of view. Use specific situations in the games to learn from them and to prepare for similar situations that may occur when you get back on the court. (i.e. prepare how to handle game control in "derby games" or find solutions for a better control of specific coaches' or players' behaviour).

Do your best to stay well prepared and in touch with officiating:

- Use this time as an opportunity to learn something new and master it.
- Upgrade your English (the official FIBA language).
- Read the FIBA rulebook and the interpretations, as well as the modifications
- Contact your mentor (or colleagues) to discuss officiating and interesting clips from the games.

The most beneficial psychological techniques that can help you to stay mentally strong during the rehabilitation process are relaxation, self-talk and imagery.

- **Relaxation techniques** such as abdominal slow breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, and music with low tempo can help you learn how to voluntarily decrease the amount of tension in your muscles, calm your mind, and decrease automatic responses (heart rate and blood pressure).
- **Positive self-talk** is a method to change your inner monologue or narrative to a positive and affirmative one. Especially during the injury recovery, positive self-talk is suggested to improve the recovery time. The people with the positive mindset recovered faster after the injury compared to those with a more negative mindset. Techniques of positive self-talk, that have an impact on your confidence and the recovery from injury, include phrases, statements and words you can repeat to yourself.
- **Imagery technique** can be highly useful and effective for the healing purposes. It can accelerate the recovery by helping you to deal with pain, reducing anxiety, increasing rehab motivation and therefore staying mentally strong during the whole recovery process. Healing imagery has proved effective in stimulating muscle activity, blood flow and helping creation of a positive mindset.

EXERCISE 2: POSITIVE SELF-TALK

Make yourself aware of your negative thoughts and replace them with positive cue words or phrases.

- "Injury that has happened is temporary. Next month I will be on the court again."
- "While I am injured it does not mean that I am having a terrible life or should give up on officiating. I choose to focus on what is going well in my life, on my recovery and the process - as long as it takes to be on the court again."
- "I have control over my thoughts. I can switch from lousy thoughts to my key words and get back to the rehabilitation process."
- "My recovery is going according to the plan. I feel better every day."
- "I will focus on my daily goals and do whatever I can and what is under my control."
- "I take required actions to stay prepared, keeping up with the officiating knowledge and the rules. While I am not able to run and practice, I can do everything else to stay prepared until the start of the physical activity."
- "If there are delays in the scheduled recovery time or disruptions in the healing process, I will be patient and will stay focused on what I can control and do."
- "I will follow the suggestions and tasks provided by my medical support team."

EXERCISE 3: HEALING IMAGERY

Before you start with the imagery, you should know what the injured structures are, what the healing process is like, what step of the healing process you are to take during your rehab, and what the structure should look like when the injury is healed.

- Start your imagery exercise with relaxation breathing rhythm that is most comfortable for you.
- After you manage to direct your attention to breathing and relaxation, start imagining a scenario of your ability to successfully complete rehabilitation task and/or exercise you usually do in the real situation.
- Imagine yourself doing the required therapeutic task and/or exercise correctly and successfully.
- See and feel the injured body part healing and getting better.
- Feel how your healing process is activated and how successful it continues.
- See and feel how your injured body part looks like when it's healed.

EXERCISE 4: VISUALIZATION & IMAGERY

Start your imagery exercise with relaxation breathing rhythm that is most comfortable for you. You can use imagery to:

- Work on your IOT. Practice specific movements, presentation and signalling, and repeat them many times in different imaginary situations.
- Improve your 3PO rotation mechanics and positioning. After watching a clip you can repeat proper rotation by visualizing it.
- Learn and rehearse rules. After you read the rule book and interpretations you can rehearse these situations in many different imaginary scenarios. Be creative.
- Master your communication skills (especially for the situations when communicating with coaches and players).
- Stay on track with the officiating experience. You can recall some interesting games you've had and experience it again. Firstly by watching it and later by visualizing the most educational situations you had in the game.
- Build up your self-confidence. You can recall the best game or the best tournament you've had and experience it again. Firstly by watching the game video, and later – in visualization.

Social support is also a very important part of your rehabilitation process. Many people you associate with are the source of your social support. Usually, they are members of your family, your friends and colleagues, even sport medicine professionals working with you. They can be very helpful providing you emotional and motivational support, personal and medical assistance, encouraging you to overcome various obstacles and challenges during the whole process.

RETURN TO OFFICIATING – READY TO STEP ON THE COURT

The rehabilitation process has come to an end and you are ready to step on the court. This stage often presents an emotional dynamic of fear and relief. Fear of reinjury is the most common emotional response. When a person ruminates or is obsessed about his/her full recovery status, the feeling of fear may create an inhibition in rehabilitation, or perhaps even questions doubting his/her abilities. It is important to stay focused on the present moment of performance and the objective factors that the recovery is finished and you are fine.

“I am ready to officiate again.”

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