



## RISK MANAGEMENT FOR COACHES AND OFFICIALS

Thousands of Australians participate in Rugby League at various levels on a regular basis. Activities range from the purely amateur recreational level to high profile professional Rugby League. No matter where on the scale an individual is placed, they may be exposed to risks that have the potential to cause physical, financial or legal disaster. Therefore the effective management of risk is an important requirement of everyone involved in Rugby League.

Coaches and officials have a vital role to play in this regard.

Coaches and officials are in a position requiring expertise and knowledge. The law imposes a duty to take all reasonable care having regard for the circumstances. They must properly instruct, officiate, supervise and warn. As a coach or official, their behavior will be judged according to what is a reasonable level of proficiency for those roles. Coaches must balance the objective of winning against the welfare and safety of all participants. It must be remembered that the younger the participants, the greater the responsibility placed on a coach or official.

First some background on risk management. The Australian Standard AS/NZS 4360:1999 defines risk as the chance of something happening that will have an impact on objectives. Risk is not necessarily harmful, it can lead to benefit or it can lead to loss. The exposure of an activity to risk is its exposure to uncertainty of outcome. The same standard defines risk management as the culture, process and structures that are directed towards the effective management of potential opportunities and adverse effects.

Risk management is as much about identifying and maximizing opportunities as it is about avoiding or alleviating losses. It is not an "off the shelf" product. It is a process that is an integral part of good management practice. Risk management is a systematic process that involves risk identification, risk analysis and evaluation, design of a risk treatment plan and the implementation of that plan, with all process levels being subject to constant monitoring and review.

Whilst legal risk is only a proportion of the risks that are addressed via risk management, negligence is an area in which coaches and officials need to have some knowledge. A negligence claim is a legal action where a person (or a group of people or a legal entity) claims monetary compensation for injury or damage suffered as a result of another person's (or a group of people or a legal entity) breach of duty of care to them. To prove a successful negligence claim there must be: -

- A duty of care owed from one party to the other
- A breach of that duty of care
- Injury or damage suffered as a result of that breach
- The incident involved needs to have been reasonably foreseeable.

Risk management aims to prevent such breaches of duty.

Coaches and officials must aim to protect the participants (playing and non-playing, physically and legally).

Prime areas for coaches and officials to consider from the risk management perspective are as follows:

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## 1. Provide a safe environment

- Detect and foresee any dangerous situations
  - Inspection of facilities
  - Inspection of equipment
  - Removal of dangerous items from playing arena
  - Use of protective equipment e.g. goal post padding
  - Spectators well away from playing area
- Environmental conditions
  - Heat, humidity, fluid replacement
  - Hypothermia

## 2. Sound planning

- Documented plans of action for supervising activities and emergency situations
- Accurate records of practice
- Plans to prevent injuries
  - Warm up
  - Stretching
  - Cool Down
  - Obeying the rules

## 3. Adequate supervision

- General supervision – e.g. supervising general use of the arena
- Specific supervision – e.g. coach in a high risk activity such as tackling practice
- Transitional supervision – i.e. a mix of the two

## 4. Proper instruction

- Proper instruction (including demonstration) on techniques and tactics of Rugby League
- Teach progressively an activity which requires an increase in skill level, strength or conditioning

## 5. Anticipate danger

- Be mindful of anticipating reasonably foreseeable dangers
- Prevention is the priority to treatment

## 6. Warning of inherent dangers

- The players must know, understand and appreciate the risks involved when training and/or competing



## **7. Evaluation of players for limitations**

- Injuries or illness will limit the players ability to participate
- Obtain doctors/first aid officers advice to clear players after injury or illness

Note: Emphasis on players to advise coaches/officials of injuries

## **8. Proper classification of players**

- Criteria to be considered in classifying players
  - Skill level
  - Age
  - Maturity
  - Size: Weight / height
  - Experience
  - Gender

## **9. Teach the Laws and rules of Rugby League**

- Rules relating to safety in particular
- All players should play within the Laws of Rugby League

## **10. Enforce the Laws of Rugby League to: -**

- Control and supervise the game
- Control players

## **11. Control violent actions**

- Inform that actions on-field may give rise to actions off-field (i.e. criminal charges/civil actions)

## **12. Discrimination and harassment**

- Discourage any acts of discrimination and/or harassment

## **13. Sexual molestation**

- Ensure that care is taken so there can be no molestation of young players
  - Child Protection legislation
  - Supervision

## **14. Selection policy**

- Ensure that players are aware of selection criteria
- Train players with regard to them developing in areas appropriate to the selection criteria



## 15. General

- Keep up to date with current practices in coaching and officiating
- Ensure counselling and information is available on the dangers of drug use (performance enhancing and recreational)
- Moral obligations – respect players – set the right example

## 16. Appropriate First Aid

- Knowledge of first aid skills and procedures
  - Basic certification in first aid care and CPR as a minimum
- Duties in providing first aid care: -
  - Protection from further harm
  - Maintaining or restoring life
  - Comforting and reassuring the injured athlete
  - Assessing and managing any injury
  - Activating emergency response plans where necessary

## First Aid Basics

### • DRABC

- Danger: check for danger
- Response: look for response from injured player. If no response: -
- Airways: with player on their side, open and clear airways
- Breathing: check for breathing
- Circulation: check for pulse

If a response, proceed to T.O.T.A.P.S. (refer below)

### • When an injury occurs, remember T.O.T.A.P.S.

- Talk to the injured player
- Observe the injured player
- Touch the injured area
- Active movement
- Passive movement
- Stand / Skills
  - o 3 options
    - o Severe: get help
    - o Less severe: "R.I.C.E.R." regime (refer below)
    - o Minor injury: play on

### • Soft tissue injury management – R.I.C.E.R. regime

- Rest: cease activity
- Ice: apply for 20 minutes every 2 hours for 24 to 72 hours (depending on severity of injury)
- Compression: firmly apply a wide compression bandage
- Elevation: raise injured area above heart level
- Refer: refer to a qualified professional e.g. doctor, physiotherapist



- **Soft tissue injury management continued**
  - Avoid H.A.R.M.
    - Heat
    - Alcohol
    - Running (exercise)/return to play
    - Massage
  - too soon after injury (the time will depend on the severity of the injury)
  
- **First aid requirements**
  - A first aid kit
  - Ice
  - Stretcher
  - Properly trained personnel in the use of such devices
  - A phone at the ground
  - Transport
  - Knowledge of the location of the nearest doctor, hospital, etc.

Whilst the law does affect sport more than ever before, this should not be seen as a negative. It is a positive reason to take the initiative to implement safe practices and risk management programs. There can be a great sense of achievement in knowing that Rugby League has satisfied its legal, moral and ethical duties by providing a safe sport that delivers quality programs.

Risk management really is all about quality coaching / officiating.