

# Next One Up!

## Exploring How Coaches Manage Team Dynamics Following Injury

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### **THANK YOU!**

The results from this study have made a valuable contribution to sport psychology and group dynamics research. Please take a moment to read through this information sheet to gain a better understanding of the project and the key findings that were discovered through your involvement. Your participation in this project is greatly appreciated!

### **Why study team dynamics in relation to injury?**

Although there is growing literature outlining a host of physical and psychological consequences experienced by athletes following injury in competitive sport, and in their attempt to return to play, there is little knowledge on the team dynamics that unfold following injury events in high-performance sport teams. As teams tend to perform better when they are united around task goals and are confident in their collective ability, there are more important practical insights to be gained from studying sport team dynamics in relation to injury events. Initial research in this area focused solely on athletes' perspectives, revealing that interpersonal tensions and role adjustments can cascade throughout a team following an injury to a key athlete. Another key finding was that athletes consistently spoke about the importance of the coaches' behaviours following injury events. Thus, we sought to gain insight into how coaches perceived and managed the team during this time.

### **What were the goals of our study?**

We hoped to gain a better understanding of coaches' perspectives on the following:

- (a) How an injury to a varsity athlete (taking them out of the lineup) affects team dynamics
- (b) Strategies commonly implemented by a coach during a time period of injury
- (c) Any factors which may influence the team dynamics or coach strategies during this time period

### **What did we do?**

We interviewed 10 head coaches of men's and women's U Sport basketball teams either in person or via telephone. Drawing from their expertise and breadth of experiences, coaches reflected and shared their insights into the changes to the team dynamics that occur when a player is injured, and any strategies in which they have or would engage during this time.

## KEY FINDINGS

Coaches identified a number of changes to the team dynamics that unfold following an injury. The nature of these changes was contingent upon on the severity of the injury, the status of the injured player (i.e., importance of the athlete to team strategy and performance), and the reaction of the coach themselves:



### How coaches elected to manage the group during this time:

- Constant communication with the injured player, all team members and an athletic therapist or medical care provider to ensure that everyone is on the same page
- Importance of supporting both the injured player, and the player(s) with increasing role(s) to ensure that everyone knows their responsibilities
- Emphasis on complying with team culture throughout the injury process, and making sure that everyone has a 'next one up' mentality



### Future Directions:

- Explore athlete's readiness to return following injury and the coach's role throughout this time
- Strive to understand how to optimally communicate roles with athletes during and following a time period of injury
- Explore changes to social identity and alienation of injured athletes

### For additional information:

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