

DISABILITY MANAGEMENT: WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM PROFESSIONAL SPORTS?

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The VBG is a German social accident insurance institution for many kinds of services, especially in the administrative sector. This includes our responsibility for sports companies. Therefore all professional sportsmen in Germany who carry out their sport in the context of an employment relationship have statutory accident insurance with the VBG.

The rehabilitation of injured top-level sportsmen makes extremely great demands on the quality of the processes and results. For this reason, improvements to structures and processes in the rehabilitation of all insured persons originate again and again in this small section of the insured community. It seems there are parallels between Return to Work in professional sport and Formula 1 motor racing. Just as various developments in Formula 1 racing become ready for serial production at some time, so the findings and enhanced methods from the rehabilitation of top sportsmen ultimately benefit all accident victims.

My message to you is:

Return to work in professional sports can function as a model in respect of

- **structures,**
- **treatment and**
- **it's direct relevance to the job.**

The structures of professional team sport permit real occupational re-integration management.

There is an optimistic attitude on the part of the employer and his environment, that has a tremendous effect on the injured person's motivation. As a rule it is assumed beyond doubt that the injured player will return to the team. This is helped by the fact that in professional sport the contact between the injured player and the rest of the

team never quite breaks down and the club structures are geared to the best possible support for their member undergoing rehabilitation.

The rehabilitation of top sportsmen starts immediately, characterized by an intensive process of diagnosis and therapy from the very first minute. The injured player is in the hands of a highly qualified, interdisciplinary team of doctors, therapists and coaches from the first moment.

They have a detailed knowledge of the specific requirements and strains of the type of sport concerned, which means that treatment can be geared to the specific activity and the right time for a return to competitive training with increasing intensity can be determined precisely.

Another area where professional sport shows itself to be a stimulus to rehabilitation is surgical techniques.

One good example is the treatment of ruptures of the anterior cruciate ligament of the knee. The surgical techniques originally directed towards restoring the injured person's ability to engage in top-class sport and tried out successfully on professional sportsmen are now standard procedure in the treatment of all physically active patients.

Through their knowledge of the latest therapeutic methods used successfully in professional sport, the VBG's case managers are in a position to place other insured persons who have to cope with similar physical strain in the hands of the most competent doctors and therapists in Germany.

Professional sport has given impetus to rehabilitation in the field of out-patient treatment too.

For a top sportsman an injury is a serious disruption to the system of body movements he has developed and trained over the course of years. The slightest interference upsets perfected sequences of motion. Muscle substance starts to decline after only 4 to 5 days without training. Against this background an immediately starting, intensive – that means up to 4 or 5 hours a day on 5 to 6 days a week - and complex course of treatment, with elements of physiotherapy, remedial gymnastics and medical training therapy - carried out partly on exercise equipment taken from fitness centres - is essential. Overcoming of the relieving posture as early as possible is one of the most important goals of this treatment and a precondition for return to work in good time. This complex Extended Physiotherapy needs

therapists with experience and latest know-how and skills.

The express objective of sports medicine therapy is to maintain the proper functioning of the uninjured parts of the body as well as healing the injury itself. Because whole-body therapy of this kind is the only way to prevent a delayed return to work caused by a loss of function of the uninjured parts of the body.

These aspects, which are so obvious in professional sport, demand our attention in connection with rehabilitation in general. The principles are the same, only the dosage of therapy may differ for injured persons apart from professional sports.

An important characteristic of the rehabilitation of professional sportsmen is the concrete relationship of all the persons concerned with a specific sport.

For all these persons the job requirements are very clear and they are able to provide a workplace-related therapy and a perfect transition from training at the rehab centre to training on the field. Such direct relevance to the workplace is the precondition for systematic therapy directed towards restoring the ability to work.

These characteristics of the rehabilitation of professional sportsmen should function as a model for workplace-related musculo-skeletal therapy in general. This therapy requires a detailed functional job analysis at the beginning, then it calls for functional capacity evaluation for the identified critical job requirements and this will lead to an individually tailored, workplace-related treatment consisting of workplace-related medical training therapy, ergotherapy and job simulation training as a preparation for returning to the workplace.