

Time to play it safe

Conference in Monaco to discuss issues related to health in sport

FOR most, the Principality of Monaco is synonymous with Formula One, royal families (now including a South African swimmer), luxury yachts and, as I discovered this past week, average property prices of R400 000 per square metre.

Monaco is also the host venue for the International Olympic Committee's World Conference on Prevention of Injury and Illness in Sport, an event that brings together researchers, doctors and directors of major sports from around the world to discuss issues related to health in sport.

Given that it happens only every three years, there is a great deal of ground to cover, ranging from eating disorders to injury. But if there was a primary concern addressed in the 2014 conference, it was traumatic brain injury in contact sports.

In South Africa, this type of injury is a real danger in rugby.

In the US, the media spotlight has fallen on American football, and the billion-dollar lawsuits that have resulted due to the risk of dementia, Alzheimer's and other debilitating conditions that can affect players later on in life as a result of frequent collisions and concussions.

These injuries have tarnished

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“The new bind rule in scrums has reduced the impact force by half

the reputation of the sport, with many parents (President Barack Obama among them) saying that they would have grave reservations about allowing their children to play the sport.

This is clearly a situation we want to avoid in rugby, and the need to reduce the risk has been taken up in a very sincere way by the IRB and national federations. New concussion guidelines, which include the sideline concussion test that you have no doubt seen many times during the Super 15 season, and policies

on when a player can return to play, have been introduced globally. These have significantly reduced the number of repeat concussions and the serious possible consequences.

South Africans have played an influential role in these guidelines, with Dr John Patricios being an influential member of a team that developed a global concussion consensus statement in Zurich last year.

In South Africa, catastrophic injuries peaked in the mid-2000s, inspiring the necessary creation of the BokSmart programme, which aims to reduce the risk by educating coaches and referees on correct techniques, playing conditions and medical management, since their influence stands to have the broadest impact on the potentially vulnerable players.

Data that was presented at the International Olympic Committee conference revealed that, to date, just under 70 000 people have passed through the BokSmart programme, with encouraging early results showing significant decreases in the number of catastrophic injuries since its inception.

Another area that has seen tremendous improvement is the safety of the scrum. Those

watching the sport will no doubt be aware of the changes in the scrum sequence — you may recall the “Crouch, touch, pause, engage” verse, and the latest version, “Crouch, bind, set”.

These changes have been introduced specifically because the scrum is recognised as the most dangerous phase of the sport — one in three catastrophic injuries occur because of collapsed scrums.

The first change — introducing the touch and pause sequence — was quickly recognised as ineffective. An IRB-commissioned study found that when the bind was introduced, the impact force dropped from about 20 000 newtons to 10 000. That 50% reduction inspired the sequence you hear and see today.

Ultimately, risk is part of sport, and realistically it can never be reduced to zero. But our objective as scientists and clinicians is to lower the risk to where it is acceptable, addressing every possible aspect to ensure maximum safety.

Monaco is by no means the end, but it did reveal significant steps towards the solutions on a global stage, and, encouragingly, many of them have been made by South Africans.



TURNING THE OTHER CHEEK: Timothy Bradley, left, takes a left from Manny Pacquiao during their WBO welterweight title bout in Las Vegas, Nevada, on Saturday. Picture: JOE KLAMAR

Pacman exacts his revenge on Bradley

GARETH A DAVIES

FILIPINO congressman Manny Pacquiao was clinical in earning a unanimous decision in his rematch with Timothy Bradley, avenging his controversial 2012 loss in their first meeting to claim the WBO welterweight crown.

Judges Craig Metcalfe and Michael Pernick scored the rematch 116-112 for Pacquiao, while Glenn Trowbridge favoured the Filipino 118-110.

Hurt in the fourth round by a hard overhand right, Pacquiao used his vast experience to come

back and dominate the contest. It was the 11th world title belt to be placed around Pacquiao's waist in a 56-5-2 career spanning 19 years.

Pacquiao was delayed from attending the post-fight news conference due to a Y-shaped tear on the corner of his left eye and eyelid. It came from a clash of heads in the 12th round.

“It was a bad tear and was an unusual shape, it was a clash of heads. He will have to have quite a few stitches and see the plastic surgeon,” explained Freddie Roach, the Hall of Fame trainer in the Filipino's corner.

Bradley attended the news conference first, limping, his face bumpy like a cobbled street: “The dude still has it. He never ducks an opponent and he faced one of the best tonight. Pacquiao is a true champion and I have great respect for him. I did my best. I fought a courageous fight. No excuses, though, I'm good.”

Bradley admitted that he had gone for broke, looking for a knockout in the early rounds.

“Big shots were the only way I was going to win the fight. If I didn't knock him out I was going to lose rounds.

“I hear I hurt him with a big

shot over the top in the fourth round. I heard my corner shouting he was hurt.”

Pacquiao handed previously unbeaten Bradley his first defeat at the MGM Grand Garden Arena with an aggressive, yet clinical performance which reminded many how good he had been in his prime.

Pacquiao left little doubt about the result of the rematch in the same arena where they met nearly two years ago.

“I knew I had to do more in this fight than I did in the last fight,” Pacquiao said afterwards in the ring. — © *The Daily Telegraph*