

## **Statement on the NCAA Soccer Study June 13, 2019**

In February 2015, the NCAA Sport Science Institute hosted the NCAA Soccer Summit. The purpose of the event was to develop a strategic agenda for the improvement of health and safety of not just NCAA soccer student-athletes, but soccer athletes of all ages. This summit also represented the NCAA's first attempt to address issues affecting the full breadth of the athlete development continuum within a single sport.

One objective of the event was to identify knowledge gaps that might be addressed by future research. One identified gap was the optimum amount of time between competitions to minimize the risk of injury while maximizing athletic performance. So, in 2016 the NCAA SSI commissioned a pilot study to be conducted by the Korey Stringer Institute at the University of Connecticut for the purposes of determining if there is a relationship between the soccer schedule and injuries. In 2017 and 2018, the study was expanded to a total of 12 Division I men's and women's soccer teams and was augmented by NCAA soccer schedule and injury surveillance data. The preliminary results of this study were reviewed during the CSMAS June 2019 meeting.

Given the nature of the sample, care must be taken when interpreting the results, which are limited in their generalizability. Nevertheless, the study reveals several interesting findings:

- In both the men's and women's game, preseason injuries occurring in practices were substantially higher than at any other point in the season or postseason (competition or practice).
- Both men's and women's soccer athletes experienced higher rates of injuries when matches occurred with 5 or less days of rest between games, as opposed to when there were 6 or more days of rest.
- Women's soccer athletes experienced higher rate of overuse injuries when matches occurred with 5 or less days rest between games, as opposed to when there were 6 or more days of rest.
- Large increases in the volume of activity in a single day (beyond what athletes were accustomed to) were associated with increased injury risk.
- Women reported higher levels of sleep dysfunction, anxiety and disablement than men's soccer players.

The committee notes that this study is completed at a time when some in the membership are seeking changes to the structure of the competitive soccer season. We understand that amongst these stakeholders, there is hope that this study will provide justification for their efforts. However, this study was not commissioned in anticipation of these efforts, and the committee cautions against any immediate interpretation that the study either supports or undermines such efforts. The fact is, this study suggests some change to the soccer season may be necessary. However, the study does not say what those changes should be, or how they should be implemented. The committee looks forward to the results making their way through the peer-reviewed process, and in the meantime, the committee will continue to seek solutions/initiatives, including additional research if necessary, that addresses the health and safety challenges facing soccer student athletes.