

# Are athletes psychologically ready for sport following a concussion?

Jeffrey G Caron,<sup>1</sup> Gordon A Bloom,<sup>1</sup> Leslie W Podlog<sup>2</sup>

Sport-related concussions have garnered increasing attention in recent years. Part of making sport safer at all levels of competition involves ensuring that concussions are properly managed. Graduated return to play (RTP)<sup>1</sup> has been a widely implemented strategy to assist with concussion management. RTP is a six-stage process managed by health professionals that progressively increases athletes' exertion until they are able to resume preconcussion activity levels.<sup>1</sup> Graduated RTP should ensure athletes are *physically* and *physiologically* ready for competition. However, existing RTP criteria do not

of athletes' ability to return to preinjury performance levels following musculoskeletal injury.

Concussed athletes also experience psychological concerns when returning to sport, possibly due to uncertain recovery times, symptoms associated with concussion (headaches, nausea and concentration difficulties), as well as growing awareness of the potential long-term cognitive impairments associated with this injury. In a study that surveyed 722 National Collegiate Athletics Association American football athletes, 40% believed they would suffer a concussion and 10% believed they

secondary injury.<sup>3 4</sup> Studying whether similar outcomes are apparent among formerly concussed athletes is both timely and necessary. To move this line of research forward, there is a need to determine (1) the key components of psychological readiness among concussed athletes, (2) whether concussed athletes receiving medical clearance to return report being psychologically underprepared and (3) the implications of psychological readiness on RTP outcomes. With regard to the implications of psychological readiness, prospective studies could also investigate whether psychological intervention is warranted among formerly concussed athletes.

Research is also needed to determine how RIAI or I-PRRS items could be integrated with existing tools that are used for RTP decision making, such as the Sport Concussion Assessment Tool 5 (SCAT5)