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*“That’s a Blue for You”: Referee Experiences Managing Concussion Injury Risk in Canadian Amateur Rugby*

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In collaboration with Rugby Canada and Rugby Ontario, this research examined the experiences of Canadian rugby Match Officials with the management of concussion injury risk and the Blue Card process. The specific experiences of female rugby Match Officials were also examined. Understanding Match Official experiences as managers of risk will help address knowledge gaps and misconceptions, and is necessary to improve the overall effectiveness of injury risk management strategies such as the Blue Card. To do this, registered rugby Match Officials in Ontario were invited to participate in online, semi-structured interviews. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions were then analyzed following the steps outlined for Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA). A total of six themes were developed from the analysis of the data. The first theme is concussion knowledge. Match officials reported varying levels of concussion knowledge in terms of the cause, severity, signs, and rehabilitation of sport-related concussion injury. The second theme is network of responsibility, where other members within the rugby community may be brought in to support the decision-making process. The blue card theme covers match official perceived concerns and benefits to the implementation of the blue card process. Gendered experience breaks down the lived experiences of female match officials and the implications for injury management. Role coherence refers match officials’ understanding of their role in rugby and injury risk management. Finally, match officials described varying levels of engagement in reflective practice as it relates to their professional development and their use of risk management strategies such as the blue card. This research provides novel insight into the use of referees as gatekeepers to, and facilitators of, risk management via the Blue Card process and contributes to the collective knowledge on the use of rule changes for managing concussion injury risk in sport.

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