



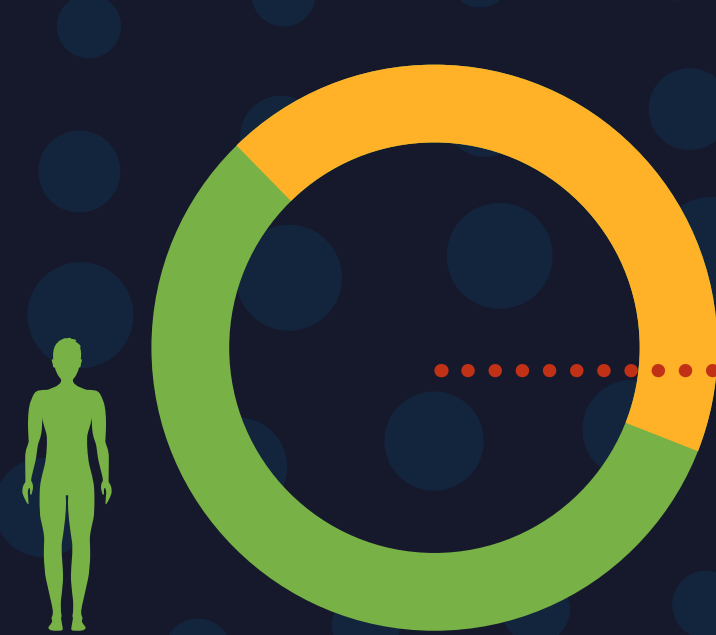
The role of performance in prevention

Kerry Peek
FIFA Medical, FIFA, Zurich, Switzerland

Heading is a highly technical football-specific skill, that can determine match results, between 19-28% of goals are scored via a header in professional football.

Recently heading guidelines have been introduced in a small number of countries to reduce the burden of heading, given the scientific and public concern that repeated heading over a playing career might lead to long-term issues with brain health. In addition, **the most common cause of an acute head injury in football, such as concussion, is from player-to-player contact during an aerial duel.**

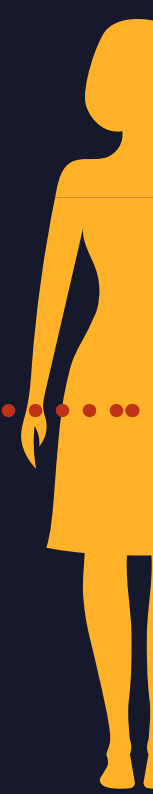
An emerging area of research is whether **improved technical performance** of heading (in both contested and uncontested situations) should be considered when developing heading guidelines and/or coaching frameworks as a possible injury prevention strategy.



In a purposive sample of FIFA World Cup matches it was observed that **women performed fewer controlled headers than men**, were **less likely** to head the ball using their **foreheads**, **less likely** to use their **upper body** and **closed their eyes earlier** before the header when compared with a similar sample of men.¹



Kerry's research, has demonstrated several differences in the technical performance of heading, particularly between men and women.



Published, and unpublished **qualitative research** has also shown that **women are less likely** to report **formal training** in heading technique,² which might in part explain why **women** are more likely to be **injured by the ball** and report a **higher number of concussions** than **men**.³

This presentation will discuss these findings as well as a first look at data from a UEFA funded project on **"Mitigating head injury risk in women's football."**



Take home messages

1



Most head injuries in football are caused by **player-to-player contact**, but **women** are more likely to be **injured by the ball**.

2

Women are also more **likely to report a lack of formal training in heading technique** (in both contested and uncontested heading situations).

3

Limited but emerging evidence suggests that acute **head injury risk** might be reduced by improving the **technical performance of headers**.



References

1. Peek K, Georgieva J, Serner A, Orest F. Differences in the technical performance of heading between men and women football players during FIFA World Cup 2022 and FIFA Women's World Cup 2023 matches. BMJ Open Sport Exerc Med. 2024;10(3):e002066.
2. Parsanejad E, McKay MJ, Ross AG, Pappas E, Peek K. Heading in football: insights from stakeholders in amateur football. Sci Med Football. 2024;8(3):212–21.
3. Peek K, Fraser K, Yearwood GM, McKay MJ. Women, concussion and disputing an old myth: the game of football is not 'unsuitable for females.' Br J Sports Med. 2024;58(6):297–8.

