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# From surgery to recovery: Athletes and ACLs

# *Research evaluates athletes’ chances of returning to sport after ACL tear*

Houston – (September 9, 2014) – National Hockey League players have the best chance to return to their sport after an ACL tear, and snowboarders have the lowest rate of returning to their sport, according to a series of papers recently published in the *Orthopaedic Journal of Sports Medicine.*

In these papers, plus published articles in *Orthopedics* and *Sports Health: A Multidisciplinary Approach,* orthopedic surgeons evaluated several major sports to determine the return to sport rate for athletes with an ACL tear. Joshua Harris, M.D., a Houston Methodist orthopedic surgeon, co-authored the papers.

“There are nearly 250,000 ACL tears each year in the United States and that number is increasing,” said Harris. “Research in causes, treatment, and recovery of ACL tears is important because it’s helping us better understand ways to prevent and treat these injuries.”

For athletes in the NFL, NBA, NHL, Major League Soccer, and the X Games, Harris and his team matched athletes with ACL tears to athletes without tears based on age, experience and pre-tear performance to determine the return to sport rate for these elite athletes.

* **NHL**: Athletes in the NHL had a return to sport rate of 97 percent – the highest rate of all major sports leagues. Left-handed shooters are more likely to tear their ACL, but all performed better after returning to the ice.
* **NFL**: For the NFL, Harris and his research team evaluated quarterbacks with ACL tears.

“Because the rates of ACL tears in the NFL are so high and specific offensive and defensive positions are unique in their cutting and pivoting demands on the knee, we decided to narrow our research for this study to quarterbacks,” explained Harris. “We chose quarterbacks because the majority of them are seen as the leaders of their team and their return from an injury can make or break a season.”

The researchers found quarterbacks have a return to sport rate of 92 percent and, on average, played for five years after returning from an ACL tear, which proved ACL tears are not career-ending injuries for quarterbacks.

* **NBA**: Harris’ team found that 62 percent of ACL tears in the NBA occur in the second half, mostly in the fourth quarter of the game, possibly due to fatigue. Overall, NBA athletes have a high return to sport rate of 86 percent. Guards have the most difficult time returning to sport, while centers have the most predictable outcomes.
* **MLS**: While most injuries in Major League Soccer athletes are non-contact injuries, these players tend to have more ACL tears in their left knee and have a 77 percent chance of returning to the field after an ACL tear.

“Because of the cutting and pivoting nature of soccer, MLS players may have more ACL tears in the leg they plant with,” said Harris. “The majority of soccer players kick with their right and plant with their left, which may explain why they tend to have more ACL tears in their left knee.”

* **X Games**: For athletes participating in the X Games, Harris and his team looked specifically at skiers and snowboarders. Skiers tend to have more tears in their left knee and had an 87 percent chance of returning to their sport. Snowboarders had a 70 percent return to sport rate and won more medals after recovering from an ACL tear.

“While ACL tears are more common in athletes, this injury can happen to anyone,” said Harris. “Researching ACL tears in athletes helps all of our patients because we are able to evaluate treatments and bring the best solutions back to our practice and get our patients back to their favorite sport or hobby.”

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