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Return-to-Sport Progression: Soccer

Note: Each phase should consist of MINIMUM ~4-6 sessions of practice, game, etc. If the athlete experiences any pain, swelling, or knee related symptoms in any phase he/she should return to previous phase. Athletes should also continue with their current rehabilitation program as instructed by PT.

Week 1/Phase 1: Linear movements, building endurance

Continue to build endurance with jogging (Goal > 45 min)

Straight line forward and lateral running drills with controlled acceleration and decelerations

Soccer specific examples:

Static, predictable passes for short distances

Touches with inside/outside of feet with ball

Week 2/Phase 2: Controlled movement with soccer ball

Continue to increase speeds in linear movements during accelerations/decelerations

Introduction of change-of-direction drills with controlled speeds

Soccer specific examples:

Forward/backward running with controlled passing/volley

Straight line dribbling with increasing speeds

Controlled 45/90/120° direction changes with ball

Controlled passing drills with moving ball for short distances

Week 3/Phase 3: Agility and reactive movement

Continue with phase 2 along with introduction of unpredictable environment (I.e. athlete follows verbal/visual commands, pressure from players)

Train phase 2 linear running drills at maximal speeds

Increase speeds with change-of-direction drills with ball

Soccer specific examples:

Multi-directional passing/shooting drills with other players, increase speed/distance

1 v 1 drills with controlled speeds, NO contact, but players can pressure

Week 4/Phase 4: Increasing speeds with light contact

Continue with phase 3 reactionary drills and increase speeds

Soccer specific examples:

(1v1, 1v2) drills, LIGHT contact

Passes and shooting for longer distances, increase speed/power (not maximum)

Corners/free kicks, increase power (not maximum)

Week 5/Phase 5: Progression to full contact scrimmage → scrimmage game

Continue to build soccer specific fitness to complete full practice

Soccer specific examples:

Small games (1v1 → 3v3) with contact, increase speed

Passing, crossing and finishing drills at game speeds

Shooting drills with maximum power

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+++ Following full progression athlete may return to scrimmage environment beginning with <50% on field time and progressing as tolerated after first scrimmage. When athlete can complete full contact scrimmage without increase in symptoms he/she may return to full game.+++

It is recommended that she increases minutes of participation in game in a gradual manner to allow her to build up endurance and not jump into full play immediately.

Reference: Buckthorpe et al (2019), On field rehabilitation part 2: A 5 stage program for soccer player focused on linear movements, multidirectional movements, soccer specific drills, soccer specific movements and modified practice. *Journal of Orthopedic Sports Physical Therapy*. 2019; 49 (8): 570–575.

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