

## RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH SPORTS ACTIVITIES: MANAGEMENT AND CONTROL

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**Abstract.** *Background.* In sports, as in other fields that associate major risks (ex: healthcare), a system of standards is needed to cover all the actions that should be taken to ensure conditions for the protection of all those involved directly or indirectly in the specific sports programs and activities. The requirements of such a standards system make the subject of the present study.

*Objectives.* This research focuses on the attempts that have been made to define and implement procedures aimed at reducing the physical and/or emotional health damage risks of an athlete.

*Methods.* This study consists of a literature review, in order to define the risk management methodology for the risks associated with sports activities, by understanding the factors that influence them.

*Results.* Risk management requirements and methodology used in healthcare services will be tested for the risks associated with sports activities to identify prevalent trends and correlations.

*Conclusion.* There are a few necessary conditions in order to support the approach of achieving a unitary risk management methodology for the risks associated with sports activities.

**Keywords:** safety, sports activities, risk management.

### Introduction

In sports, as in other fields associated with significant risks, there is a need for a system of standards that targets all actions that should be undertaken to ensure conditions for protecting all those directly or indirectly involved in specific programs and activities.

In the modern landscape of organized sports, athlete safety is a fundamental concern that extends far beyond injury prevention. Whether we refer to amateur or elite performance levels, sports environments are increasingly complex and carry a wide array of risks—physical, emotional, social, and institutional. Therefore, the need for a comprehensive and standardized approach to risk management in sports is critical. As in other high-stakes domains such as healthcare, the sports sector requires a structured system of standards and protocols designed to protect all individuals directly or indirectly involved in activities and programs. These standards should not only aim to reduce injury rates but also ensure psychological safety, uphold human rights, and preserve the dignity of every participant.

In recent years, several organizations and governing bodies have initiated efforts—still fragmented and inconsistently applied—to define and implement “safeguarding procedures.” These procedures include preventive measures (such as risk education and facility inspections), response



strategies (e.g., incident reporting systems), and evaluation frameworks (such as injury surveillance and behavioral audits). However, their application often lacks coherence at the national level, especially in systems where policies are decentralized or vary widely between disciplines, activities, managers and institutions.

To advance toward a unified methodology for managing risks associated with sports activities, several foundational conditions must be met:

- The existence of a national-level coordinated strategy for identifying, evaluating, and managing risks, applicable across institutions and sport types;
- The development of a specialized vocabulary to eliminate inconsistencies and ambiguities found in current methodologies and communication channels;
- The creation of mechanisms for inter-institutional communication, ensuring that information about emerging risks and best practices is shared systematically;
- The establishment of a common set of evaluation criteria, enabling stakeholders to assess the impact of risks on various participant groups (e.g., children, amateur athletes, elite professionals, staff).

Beyond terminology and protocols, risk must be understood as a potential future event—uncertain but plausible—that may threaten or enhance the achievement of established goals. In this context, risk is not inherently negative; it may also represent opportunities for improvement, innovation, and growth.

*Risk management*, then, is the process of anticipating, understanding, and addressing such uncertainties. It involves taking proactive measures to reduce the likelihood of harmful events, mitigating their impact if they occur, and continuously refining strategies through feedback and monitoring. In sports, effective risk management contributes not only to safety but to the overall quality, sustainability, and credibility of athletic programs and institutions.

Risk management involves actions aimed at reducing the likelihood (possibility) of the risk occurring and/or mitigating its consequences (impact) on outcomes (objectives), should the risk materialize. In cases where the risk represents a threat, risk management entails reducing exposure to it.

*Risk management in sports* is to be a complex process of identifying, analyzing, and responding to potential risks associated with sports activities. It has to be a documented approach that utilizes material, financial, and human resources to achieve objectives while reducing exposure to loss.

## **Risks Related to Sports Activities**

To effectively identify the risks associated with sports activities, it is essential to conduct a thorough analysis of several key aspects. These reflect both structural vulnerabilities and human factors that influence the safety and well-being of athletes. Below is an expanded set of risk indicators and contextual explanations:

- *Level of awareness and promotion of safety and protection policies*  
An initial vulnerability lies in the extent to which sports organizations actively disseminate and apply safety values and safeguarding principles. Institutions that do not clearly communicate their commitment to athlete protection may unintentionally foster environments where risks go unaddressed or underreported.
- *Professional competencies of staff interacting with athletes*  
Coaches, trainers, medical staff, and administrative personnel must be adequately trained not only in their core specialties but also in safeguarding practices, recognizing signs of abuse, injury risk, and psychological distress. Ongoing professional development in these areas is critical.

- *Capacity to ensure safety within sports clubs and training camps*  
This includes ensuring that physical infrastructure (facilities, fields, gyms) and sports equipment meet established safety standards. Regular audits and maintenance checks are essential to reduce the likelihood of injuries caused by faulty or outdated infrastructure.
- *Respect for athletes' rights regarding physical, mental, and emotional health*  
Athletes, especially children and adolescents, must be protected from overtraining, psychological pressure, and burnout. Their participation should be encouraged in a way that prioritizes long-term well-being over short-term performance.
- *Respect for athletes' personal integrity and dignity*  
Discriminatory behaviours, harassment, and degrading treatment violate ethical standards and directly increase emotional risk. Clubs must have clear codes of conduct and grievance procedures in place.
- *Confidentiality and data protection*  
As the digitalization of sports management grows, so does the importance of protecting personal data, including medical history, biometric monitoring, and performance records. Data breaches or misuse may lead to reputational damage or psychological consequences.
- *Environmental safety during sports activities*  
Environmental hazards (extreme weather, poor air quality, pollution, or unsafe terrain) should be assessed prior to outdoor events. Organizers must have contingency plans and ensure that athletes are informed and equipped to respond appropriately.

Additional factors to consider in an advanced risk identification system:

- *Psychosocial climate within the team or club*  
Toxic team dynamics, verbal abuse, or authoritarian leadership may go unnoticed but can have long-lasting impacts on mental health and performance. Athlete surveys and anonymous feedback mechanisms are recommended.
- *Transition periods (e.g., age category changes, club transfers)*  
Athletes going through transitions are more vulnerable to loss of social support and identity-related stress. Institutions should monitor these periods carefully.
- *Travel and accommodation risks*  
Competitions often involve travel and unfamiliar environments. Risk assessments should cover transportation logistics, accommodation standards, and emergency protocols.

The inherent complexity of sports activities has long warranted the development of a dedicated academic and clinical field—sports medicine—underscoring the need for similarly structured approaches in other domains of support and safety. In this context, the conceptualization and formal regulation of risk management specific to sports activities is not only useful, but essential. Such a framework would align with the broader objective of safeguarding health, performance, and ethical standards within the increasingly professionalized and high-stakes environment of modern sport.

To support all the above, in Table 1, requirements of healthcare quality and safety standards are tested as applicable or not in sports organizations.

As ten key aspects were listed for an effective identification of the risks associated with sports activities, a requirement of healthcare quality and safety standards is to be considered applicable if it can be related to at least four (more than a third) of these.

„Risk management ensures protection against potential harm“ is related to the following aspects:

- Capacity to ensure safety within sports clubs and training camps
- Respect for athletes' rights regarding physical, mental, and emotional health
- Confidentiality and data protection
- Environmental safety during sports activities
- Psychosocial climate within the team or club
- Travel and accommodation risks

*„Areas and conditions with potential physical risk to individuals (e.g., falling, slipping, impact, electroctrical shock) are identified and preventive measures are in place“* is related to the following aspects:

- Capacity to ensure safety within sports clubs and training camps
- Respect for athletes' rights regarding physical, mental, and emotional health
- Environmental safety during sports activities
- Travel and accommodation risks

*„Protective, security, and surveillance measures are implemented for both property and individuals“* is related to the following aspects:

- Capacity to ensure safety within sports clubs and training camps
- Respect for athletes' rights regarding physical, mental, and emotional health
- Respect for athletes' personal integrity and dignity
- Confidentiality and data protection
- Psychosocial climate within the team or club
- Environmental safety during sports activities
- Travel and accommodation risks

*„Cleaning and disinfection of spaces and equipment are regulated and systematically monitored“* is related to the following aspects:

- Capacity to ensure safety within sports clubs and training camps
- Respect for athletes' rights regarding physical, mental, and emotional health
- Environmental safety during sports activities
- Travel and accommodation risks

*„Conditions are adapted to accommodate individuals with disabilities or special needs“* is related to the following aspects:

- Capacity to ensure safety within sports clubs and training camps
- Respect for athletes' rights regarding physical, mental, and emotional health
- Respect for athletes' personal integrity and dignity
- Confidentiality and data protection
- Environmental safety during sports activities
- Transition periods (e.g., age category changes, club transfers)
- Travel and accommodation risks

**Table 1.** Requirements of healthcare quality and safety standards, tested as applicable or not in sports organizations

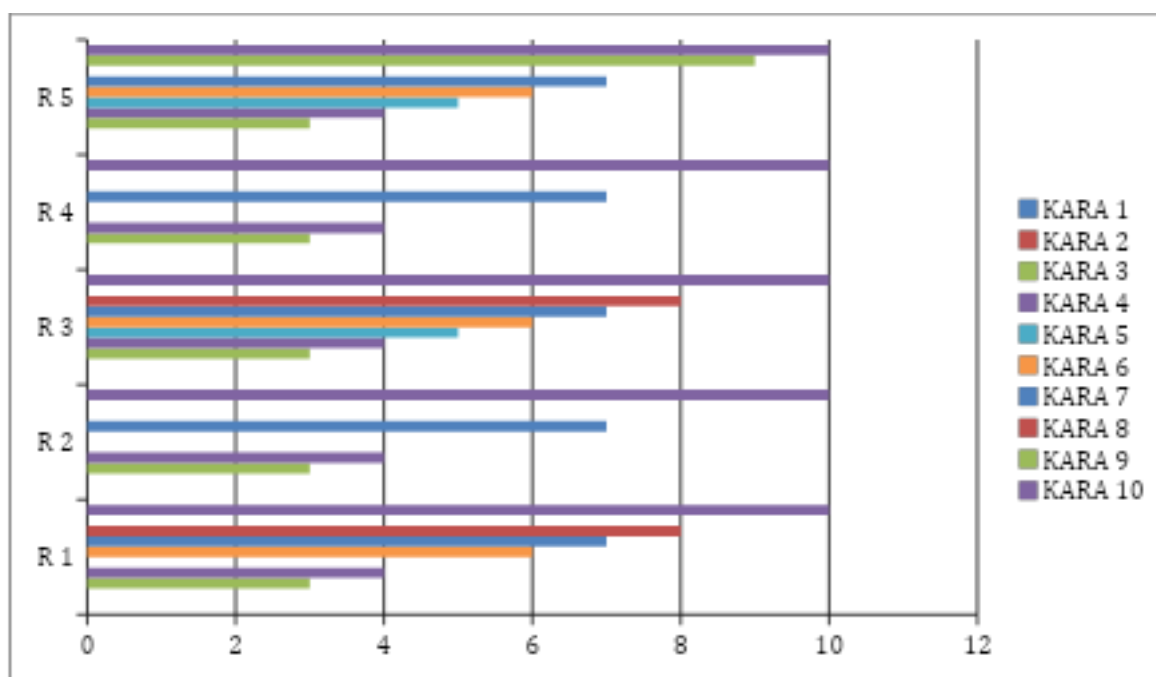
No.	Requirement	Applicable / Not
1.	Risk management ensures protection against potential harm.	
2.	Risk management ensures protection against potential harm.	Applicable
3.	Risk management ensures protection against potential harm.	Applicable
4.	Cleaning and disinfection of spaces and equipment are regulated and systematically monitored.	Applicable
5.	Conditions are adapted to accommodate individuals with disabilities or special needs.	Applicable

## Results

The inherent complexity of sports activities has long warranted the development of a dedicated academic and clinical field–sports medicine–underscoring the need for similarly structured approaches in other domains of support and safety. In this context, the conceptualization and formal regulation of risk management specific to sports activities is not only useful, but essential. Such a framework would align with the broader objective of safeguarding health, performance, and ethical standards within the increasingly professionalized and high-stakes environment of modern sport.

In order to define the risk management methodology for the risks associated with sports activities, this study consists of a literature review for the factors that influence them.

To support the critical need for a comprehensive and standardized approach to risk management in sports, requirements of healthcare quality and safety standards (R1-R5), were considered applicable in sports organizations, if they could be related to at least four key aspects of an effective identification of the risks associated with sports activities (KARA 1 – KARA 10), as shown in Fig. 1.



**Figure 1.** Number of risks associated with sports key aspects, related to the requirements of healthcare quality and safety standards.

## Conclusions

*Risk management* is the process of anticipating, understanding, and addressing uncertainties. It involves taking proactive measures to reduce the likelihood of harmful events, mitigating their impact if they occur, and continuously refining strategies through feedback and monitoring.

Risk management involves actions aimed at reducing the likelihood (possibility) of the risk occurring and/or mitigating its consequences (impact) on outcomes (objectives), should the risk materialize. In cases where the risk represents a threat, risk management entails reducing exposure to it.

In sports, effective risk management contributes not only to safety but to the overall quality, sustainability, and credibility of athletic programs and institutions.

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