Special considerations to coach female soccer players

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Female participation in the sport of soccer has considerably increased in the last few years. According to the FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) Big Count 2006 about 26 million women (or 10%) out of 265 million total players play soccer worldwide. The number of female registered players increased by over 50% in 2006 compared to the previous FIFA Big Count in 2000 [1]. Therefore, many coaches who previously coached male players have now to coach female players. When coaching female players these coaches try to use the same training methods and loads that they used to use with the men without considering the special characteristics of the female players. For this reason, the purpose of the present talk is to discuss differences in physical and physiological characteristics, health issues, and injuries between female and male players. For instance, female players usually have a higher percent of body fat and better flexibility than male players. However, females are generally lighter, shorter, have lower muscle mass, endurance, speed, strength, power and agility than males [2, 3]. Moreover, the menstrual cycle and pregnancy are only present in women and their effects on soccer performance should be considered. Female players could develop the following health issues if their training and nutrition regimes are not adequate: female athlete triad (disorder eating, menstrual dysfunction, and osteoporosis) and iron deficiency and anemia [4, 5]. Furthermore, female players have a higher risk to suffer from knee injuries, especially injury to the anterior cruciate ligament (ACL), than their male counterparts [6, 7]. Consequently, it is important that coaches of female players know and understand these gender differences in order to select more appropriate training methods and loads for their players, which in turn will help to increase player's enjoyment of the game, to prevent common female specific health issues and soccer-related injuries, and ultimately to improve players' overall soccer performance.

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