

A Spotlight on Mascot Injuries

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Sports mascots are a high-profile part of the entertainment at sports events, but what isn't so apparent is the relatively high rate of injuries among the people inside the costumes. Poor visibility from inside the costume and altered proprioception can create conditions ripe for injury, and mascots are often the inadvertent targets of contact injuries from athletes or enthusiastic fans. Also, a trend toward more dramatic stunts have pumped up the athletic demands of being a mascot.

A survey documenting the high rate of mascot injuries was presented by Johns Hopkins researchers in June at the annual meeting of the American College of Sports Medicine in Baltimore. The group surveyed all professional mascots in baseball, football, and basketball. From 48 returned surveys, researchers identified 179 injuries during mascot participation. (The rate appears to be lower than that for other professional sports.) The knee was the most common injury site, followed by hand/wrist/finger, and ankle. Ankle sprain was the most common acute injury reported, and 44 percent of mascots noted a history of chronic low-back pain. Twenty-two injuries required surgical repair.

Heat injury was reported among 28 mascots; 14 required intravenous fluids, 6 were diagnosed with heat stroke, and 1 was hospitalized. In fact, the researchers concluded that heat illness may be the most important health problem in this population.

Several mascot injuries have made headlines. In November 1999, Ball Hog, a mascot with the former Edmonton Drillers of the National Professional Soccer League, was playing in a sports celebrity soccer exhibition game and was knocked down by an Edmonton Oilers player. The impact caused a metal screen inside the costume to cut the mascot's forehead. In 1997, a University of Cincinnati student who wore the Bearcat mascot costume at basketball games was hospitalized when he suffered a severe respiratory attack that was thought to be related to the heat inside the costume.