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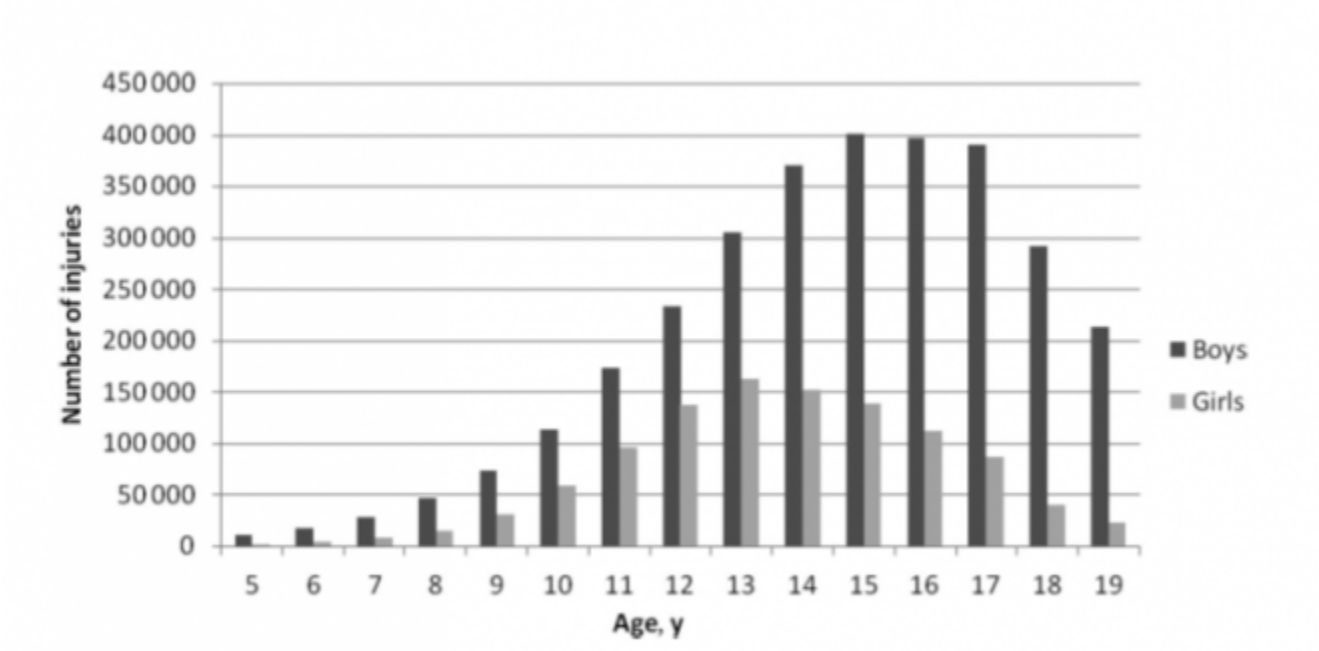
Basketball-Related Brain Trauma Sees Sharp Rise

By Erik Malinowski September 14, 2010 | 2:07 pm | Categories: Fitness, Medicine, Science

Traumatic brain injuries involving young athletes playing basketball rose 70 percent over a recent 11-

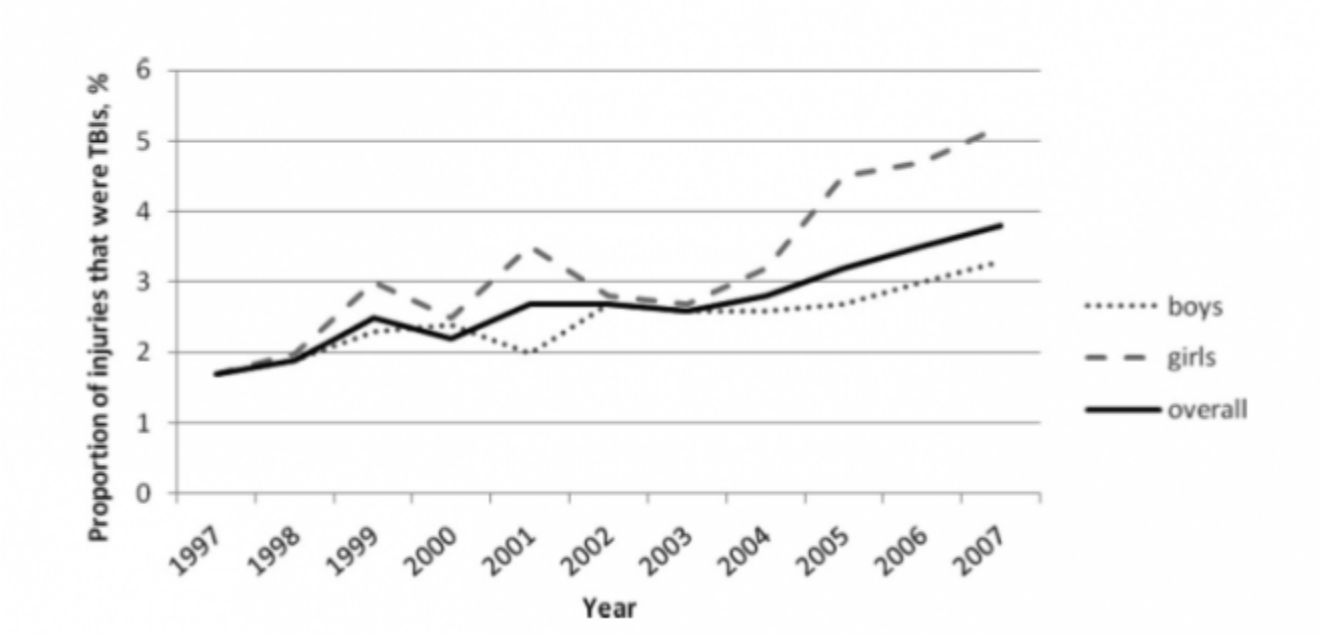
year period, even though the number of overall basketball injuries declined.

According to researchers at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio, each year from 1997 through 2007 saw an average of 375,350 basketball-related emergency room visits among children ages 5 to 19. The most common ailments, the team found, involved common sprains and strains to the legs, knees and ankles. Fractures were more common for the upper extremities, as well as dislocations.



However, those assuming that boys play a more physical version of basketball as compared to their female counterparts would be wrong. The data showed that, when it comes to incidents of TBI (traumatic brain injury), boys were less likely than girls (on a proportional basis) to contract those, as well as knee injuries. On the other hand, broken bones, dislocated joints and simple cuts were more common among male players.

The study's age breakdown also seems to skew against stereotype. Perception might be that older athletes (age 11 to 19) would be more likely to suffer TBIs than younger players (age 5 to 10), but the opposite was true, perhaps owing to the fragility of younger brains still in critical development phases or the pressure put on by coaches of older players to *Get back in the game!* after getting knocked around in the paint, thus resulting in fewer diagnoses. (Or, conversely, it could just be that older players are better at lying about their potential injuries, not wanting to seem weak in front of teammates, coaches and fans.)



Indeed, researchers conclude that although traumatic brain injuries made up only 2.6 percent of all the injuries, "the actual number of TBIs may be larger than our estimates," citing a 2009 study that found that more than one-third of athletes "did not recognize concussion symptoms or report these symptoms to trainers" and that 28 percent of players stayed in the game after experiencing dizziness from a knock to the head.

The Ohio team surmises that the steep increase in TBIs may lie with an "ever-increasing level of competitiveness and intensity of training and play, starting at younger ages." One of their recommendations include the use of "age-appropriate basketballs," which they claim will decrease concussion rates and other related injuries. Also, they say "rough play should be discouraged," so as to minimize on-court contact and collisions.

The Ohio study — the first to ever conduct widespread research on the extent of brain injuries among basketball players — couldn't come at a more opportune time, with professional leagues like the NFL going all out to (finally) warn players of the long-term effects of concussions and other brain trauma.

Whether that will ultimately trickle down and contribute to the long-term safety of younger athletes is the question.

Photo: Flickr/shanepope, CC

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Comments (2)

Posted by: mattcrwi | 09/14/10 | 5:13 pm |

Did you see steward bradley get back on the field in the packers vs eagles game this past sunday? He couldn't walk and they put him back on the field next play. There's a good message sent by the NFL.

Posted by: merlinachenz | 09/15/10 | 12:04 am |

Well, **the next lebron kid**, plays amazingly well on the leaked videos.
