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The rugby shoulder score as a method to detect sub-clinical shoulder dysfunction in professional rugby league players.

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^aThe shoulder has been reported as the most commonly injured joint in rugby league (McDonough & Funk 2014, *Physical Therapy in Sport*, 15, 91-96). Whilst contact injuries make up the majority of shoulder injuries in rugby league, many shoulder pathologies are of insidious onset or linked to training loads (King et al., 2014, *International Journal of Sports Science and Coaching*, 9, 417 – 431). Given that previous injury is the greatest risk factor for future injury in many sports (Benita 2016, *Sports Medicine*, 46, 79), it is pertinent to develop methods which detect early stage pathology. At present, it is not yet known what the incidence of players playing with an existing sub-clinical shoulder dysfunction are. The Rugby Shoulder Score (Roberts and Funk, 2013, *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, 47, 920 – 926), a uni-dimensional 120 point (20 – 140), scale was developed to monitor shoulder function in players undergoing rehabilitation from shoulder injury. The aim of this study was to determine whether the Rugby Shoulder Score (RSS) was capable of detecting sub clinical shoulder dysfunction in players actively engaged in training and match play. Following University ethics approval, 18 professional super league rugby players were invited to provide written informed consent. A total of 12 players completed the RSS at the midway point of the season. One player reported a perfect score (20) and the remaining 11 indicated varying levels of shoulder dysfunction (23-69) as measured by the RSS. On average players reported a score of 45 indicating that players were training and playing ~21% below maximum function. This study reported that 91% of this small sample (n=12) of professional rugby players were training and playing with some level of shoulder dysfunction at the midway point in the super league season. This pilot study warrants further investigation in a representative sample.