

VU Research Portal

Safer rugby through BokSmart? Evaluation of a nationwide injury prevention programme for rugby union in South Africa

Brown, J.

2015

document version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication in VU Research Portal](#)

citation for published version (APA)

Brown, J. (2015). *Safer rugby through BokSmart? Evaluation of a nationwide injury prevention programme for rugby union in South Africa*. [PhD-Thesis – Research external, graduation internal, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam].

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

E-mail address:

vuresearchportal.ub@vu.nl

FOREWORD

BY MORNE DU PLESSIS, FORMER SPRINGBOK CAPTAIN, MANAGER OF THE 1995 WORLD CUP-WINNING SPRINGBOKS AND CBPJPF CHAIRMAN

“How is the Fund Going?”

This is one of the most “frequently asked questions” I am confronted with as Chairman of the Chris Burger/ Petro Jackson Fund. As friendly and well-meaning the question is, it inadvertently puts myself and my fellow Trustees in a predicament in returning an accurate answer!

The Fund was started 35 years ago to look after the needs of rugby players who have met with catastrophic rugby injuries - “Rugby’s helping hand” as it is more fondly known. One would be tempted to describe the going as “good” for the Fund as we have assisted more than 400 players to date, but therein lies the dilemma we have faced for many years – the Fund will reach its purest objective when there is, in fact, *no* need for assistance for catastrophically injured rugby players. The slogan of QASA (Quadriplegics Association of South Africa), very aptly describes what should also be our mantra: “We don’t want any new members”.

With this in mind, and prodded by various concerned parties, and motivated by results achieved by similar safety programmes in NZ and Australia, the CB/PJ Fund and the SARU embarked upon the hugely innovative and ambitious rugby safety programme *BokSmart*. It stands to very good reason that after 5 years of this massive safety intervention activity in our rugby-loving country that we faced a moment of truth, and asked the critical questions:

Firstly, do we have an injury problem, and secondly, has the implemented programme been successful?

James Brown has set about finding the answers to these questions in this excellent thesis that will serve South African and world rugby well. While the outcome of the

research is generally positive, perhaps more importantly it paves the way forward for further improvement and effectiveness.

Our ultimate goal is zero tolerance for serious rugby injuries, we will keep working on making the game safer for all those who play it.

Morne du Plessis

Cape Town

February 2015



Figure 1. LEFT - Morne Du Plessis (Chairman of the Chris Burger Petro Jackson Players' Fund), and RIGHT - Dr Wayne Viljoen (BokSmart manager) at the launch of the BokSmart programme in South Africa in July 2009. The BokSmart programme is a joint initiative of the Chris Burger Petro Jackson Players' Fund and the South African Rugby Union (SARU). Photo by Carl Fourie/Gallo Images ©

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Much like success in a rugby match, a PhD is reliant on a team effort. These next couple of pages are simply an attempt to acknowledge some of the people in that 'team'.

First and foremost thanks to my parents for providing me with all the necessary life skills to be able to attempt this PhD. Mom and Dad - you guys are the ultimate example of selfless love and sacrifice: making sure your children had everything they needed in life to achieve whatever they wanted. I can never thank you enough for that. In the same vein, thanks to my sister, and at times second mother, **Kerry** for also always being supportive of me from before I can even remember. I love you and am very lucky to be able to call you my family.

Thanks to my school and university friends in Cape Town for always at least pretending to be interested in what I was doing – even though they were never sure whether I was doing an Honours, Masters, or PhD. Special thanks to Andy Wills for those chats on early morning runs that were very necessary in the final stages of my thesis.

From travelling the world and visiting different departments, I now realise how lucky we are at ESSM in Cape Town with our first class facilities. However, what I've come to realise what distinguishes ESSM is the amazing people who fill the building: their simultaneous excellence and humility is a great example for any student. Thanks to **Tim Noakes** and **Morne Du Plessis** for their brilliance in creating the Sports Science Institute of South Africa, but at the same time, careers in Exercise Science.

Thanks to just some of the people who fill the Institute and ESSM: the "office of excellence" (**Ben, Sharief, Colleen, Kevin and Julia Thomas**) and those who sounded like they were in our office (**Nic 'the Zebra' Tam**). Thanks for being there through the highs and lows of my personal PhD journey – we have laughed plenty

and ranted even more. You guys have also all taught me so much and I think you still have plenty to teach me – let's make sure we don't ever lose contact. Thanks also to the admin/lab staff who work tirelessly to assist us: **Trevino, Nezaam, Ayesha, Fiona, Lance/Leila, Lesa and Megan** – we really appreciate all the assistance you give us.

To my Honours and Masters supervisor, **Malcolm**, thanks for teaching me so much about science (but mainly about editing tables) during those three years. Thanks also for your wise guidance and your altruistic attitude towards me as a student – whether you were my supervisor or not. Thanks also for your friendship.

I was privileged to have four supervisors for my PhD - all of whom I got on with to the point that I hope this is just the beginning of our journeys: **Mike, Willem, Evert** and **Cathi**. I have learnt so much from all of you. The addition of international supervisors from the Netherlands ensured that I also developed a thick skin during this PhD: there is no such thing as a sugar coat or a euphemism in Dutch-English.

My first thanks must go to **Mike**, without whom this PhD opportunity would never have landed in my lap. From our Honours year when you entrusted the *BokSmart* reports to me so that I could get some holiday money; to being the link for the SAVUSA PhD; to organising my Post-Doctoral position that will be waiting for me once I have extra letters to my name; you have always looked after me very well. I'm not sure why you did, but I thank you. I don't know what I would be doing if it weren't for you, but I know I would have a lot less job satisfaction than I do now. You exemplify the excellence and humility of ESSM and it is something I really hope has rubbed off on me for my future career, whatever I may do.

Willem – despite your seniority, you always made time for me, even if it was to organise a bike for me to get around Amsterdam. No issue was 'below' you, which I appreciate greatly. I feel lucky to have been able to work with you. Thanks for always being interested and willing to assist in my future career development, which meant that I always felt cared for and never felt like another sausage on the production line. I will also pay heed to your advice about life being too short, and that it should always be enjoyed.

Evert – thanks not only for your mentorship, but your friendship too. We managed to work hard, but play hard too on your trips to SA: Goldfish watching, surfing, trail running on Table Mountain, wine tasting. I hope these activities don't come to an end now! Through your example, I learnt about ultimate work efficiency, and also that injury prevention is not only important, but 'cool'. While I can't promise to ever emulate you in these regards, I'll certainly try.

Cathi – thanks for always being patient with me through qualitative research, which did not, and may not ever, come naturally to me! You were always way ahead of schedule in terms of edits, which made a huge difference, especially as it got towards the critical hand-in date! I look forward to continuing to work with you in the future as I have a lot more to learn from you!

To the SARU medical department guys, **Clint and Wayne**. Whenever I thought I was wasting my time doing this PhD our close relationship with your department kept me going. You guys were able to show me that my work had real-world relevance and that there was something more important on the line than a PhD – this was critically important in retaining necessary perspective. However, you didn't provide this acceptance easily, you both pushed me, in very different ways, to keep checking that my results always made “real world sense”. Through this experience, I genuinely feel that I have developed extra skills that I would not have ordinarily developed during a PhD journey, for which I am extremely grateful. Even though I always know you guys will test me, especially “eagle eyes Viljoen”, I really hope this is the beginning of a long and fruitful relationship. I feel privileged to work for two individuals who are so completely and unselfishly dedicated to the welfare of the players in their control – you are both inspirations to me. The rugby players of South Africa have no idea how lucky there are to have you in your respective roles; if only every sports federation could offer the same! Also a special thanks to **Zeenat** – no matter how boring or tedious a situation, you always helped to make it fun. Thanks for always going above and beyond the call of duty; you are a really special person and Wayne and Clint are very lucky to work with you. Thanks of course to **Ali** and **Arnie** as well for all their assistance, but most importantly for always being friendly and welcoming to me!

Another special thanks needs to be made to the Chris Burger Petro Jackson Players' Fund and especially **Gail Baerecke**, whom I have only got to know in the latter stages on my PhD. While I had less involvement with the Players' Fund during my thesis, the love and care they have for the injured players they serve was an incredible inspiration to me. The fund is a veritable lotus flower: emerging from the tragedy experienced by **Morne Du Plessis** when his friend and fellow player Chris Burger was tragically killed while playing the game he and millions of others love. As a result of the Players' Fund mandate to look over catastrophically injured players, we now have an idea of catastrophic injury rates and risk factors in South Africa. Thanks also to the fund for my opportunity of a Post-doctoral position for 2015/6. I look forward to further developing my relationship with you and your benevolent organisation.

To my Amsterdam friends – thanks for making such an effort to make me feel at home while I was in the Netherlands. To the VU 5th floor crew (in alphabetical order of course): **Arnela, Dirk, Isis, Femke, Hanneke, “the Juan”, Judith, Julian (adopted Dutchie 1), Kasper, Luiz (adopted Dutchie 2), Mireille, Saskia, Vera, Wallace (adopted Dutchie 3)** – thanks for the coffee walk-and-talks and lunchtime breaks – it made the world of difference having you guys to talk to! I also appreciate that you would all spoke in English on my behalf – I know it was a hassle. Thanks for also always including me in your Borrels, kroegentochten and general fun activities. Through this I have learnt, at the very least, the most important Dutch words to get by any situation: ‘*echt?*’, ‘ja oor’, ‘nee’, ‘een biertje’, ‘een fluitje’ and ‘petje af’. And you guys are really not rude – I just like to tell you that you are. Thanks also to **Inge** for always treating me to coffee or ice-cream – whatever the weather dictated. A special thanks to **Joske** who always made sure I not only had everything I needed, but was also happy! **Maarten** was roped into the last part, allowing me to surf in the Netherlands, which certainly helped me feel less home-sick! And last but not least, thanks also to my equally home-sick Uilenstede (still not sure how you say that) friends: **Eva** and **Heidi**. I am really lucky to have bumped into you and shared some great nights in the classy Café Uilenstede bar – what a pity it didn't happen earlier than it did! After meeting you, I also always remember to shake the Chef's hand after a good meal!!!

Speaking of Dutch friends there are also some non-VU people I need to thank. **Tanja and Sean** – thanks for taking me in like a surrogate son, you guys were a life-line when I was very lonely in the Netherlands – nothing like a braai to cure homesickness! **Milou, Arnoud, Hendrieke and Erik** – thanks for all the effort you made in showing me the real Amsterdam: yes, *Cool down Café* is included in that! **Annick** – thanks for looking after me from across the border in Belgium even when things were not so rosey for you. I owe you big-time for looking after me for when those (stupid) Belgian trains never arrived and you had to drive across the country to fetch me! **Mieke and Pol** and family – thank for taking me in and involving me in all your fun activities – you always made me feel welcome and showed me an amazing part of the Netherlands I didn't know existed. I know we will keep in touch and look forward to seeing Jochem and Floor continue to grow up to be superstar ice-skaters (Floor) and dancers (Jochem)! **Ben, Esme, Henk and Ingrid** – man am I glad we happened to be on that same hike all those years ago in South Africa. I loved coming to visit you in Utrecht – thanks for always involving me in your parties and activities with no hassle! You always made such an effort for me. I know that we will be friends for a long time – I look forward to seeing you again in South Africa some time, I think your return visit is now overdue!

To all the coaches, referees and players who were involved in my research – this would not have been possible without you guys. I really hope you see the benefit of our research in years to come - this was the whole point of our work! Special thanks must go to the coaches of the following schools and clubs: **Wynberg Boys High School Rugby coaches, iQhiyiya School, Trafelgar High School, Hamilton's Rugby Club, Blue Jets Rugby Club, Silvertree Rugby Football Club**. For facilitating this research, special thanks **Peter Murison, Jongi Mguga (TagRugby)** and to the **BokSmart Union Reps**, especially **Alfred Ross, Allan O'Connell, Andre Human, Ben Theron and Lindsay Booyesen, Harry Pienaar, Agri Makoena, Kat Swanepoel, Martin De Vos, Selvyn Colby, Timmy Goodwin and Titch Cartright**. Thanks also to **Jonathan Joshua** for being a friend as well as a colleague during data collection: thanks for all the chats in Upper Roodebloem road! *Nkosi kakulu* **Eric** and **Nandi** – thank you not only for your invaluable translation skills, but also for always doing so with a big smile on your face.

And then to the most important person who has dealt with all the lows and highs of this journey – the mouth ulcers, the sleepless nights, the unnecessary stressing and for dealing with a grumpy old man stuck in a 20-something year old body. **Julia** - I'm amazed, but very glad you are still here. You deserve some sort of award, but I hope being able to enjoy our lives together without a PhD hanging over my head will be some consolation. I will never truly be able to express how lucky I was to get your informed opinions on issues that I was grappling with. With your annoying jokes you also did a good job of reminding me that life is too important to be taken seriously. Just remember that I am as clever as you now so you can stop telling me what to do.