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Nonoperative management for in-season athletes with anterior shoulder instability.

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BACKGROUND: Acute or recurrent anterior shoulder instability is a frequent injury for in-season athletes. Treatment options for this injury include shoulder immobilization, rehabilitation, and shoulder stabilization surgery.

PURPOSE: To determine if in-season athletes can be returned to their sports quickly and effectively after nonoperative treatment for an anterior instability episode.

METHODS: Over a 2-year period, 30 athletes matched the inclusion criteria for this study. Nineteen athletes had experienced anterior dislocations, and 11 had experienced subluxations. All were treated with physical therapy and fitted, if appropriate, with a brace. These athletes were followed for the number of recurrent instability episodes, additional injuries, subjective ability to compete, and ability to complete their season or seasons of choice.

RESULTS: Twenty-six of 30 athletes were able to return to their sports for the complete season at an average time missed of 10.2 days (range, 0-30 years). Ten athletes suffered sport-related recurrent instability episodes (range, 0-8 years). An average of 1.4 recurrent instability episodes per season per athlete occurred. There were no further injuries attributable to the shoulder instability. Sixteen athletes underwent surgical stabilization for their shoulders during the subsequent off-season.

CONCLUSIONS: Most of the athletes were able to return to their sport and complete their seasons after an episode of anterior shoulder instability, although 37% experienced at least 1 additional episode of instability during the season.



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