Reviewer's report

Title: Low back pain in elite and semi-elite Australian football codes: a cross-sectional survey of football (soccer), Australian-Rules, rugby league, rugby union and non-athletic controls

Version: 1 Date: 3 December 2008

Reviewer: Lise Hestbaek

Reviewer's report:

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined? Yes
2. Are the methods appropriate and well described? With the exception of the analysis-section
3. Are the data sound? Apparently
4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition? The statistical analysis-section and the tables presenting results do not, otherwise yes.
5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data? I do not understand the reported results and can therefore not judge this.
6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated? Yes
7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished? As far as I can see.
8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found? As with statement # 5: I don’t know.
9. Is the writing acceptable? Yes

Please make your review as constructive and detailed as possible in your comments so that authors have the opportunity to overcome any serious deficiencies that you find and please also divide your comments into the following categories:

• Discretionary Revisions (which are recommendations for improvement but which the author can choose to ignore)

As a non-football player, I muse about over the term “non-athlete” as a person not playing football!

The result section might benefit from a more stringent form, for example using subheadings or other type of division in the text to create an overview.
• Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

• Major Compulsory Revisions (which the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

I am sorry, I am not very constructive now, but I simply do not understand the last paragraph in the method section and the corresponding tables. Therefore, I cannot suggest relevant changes. May be it is due to my lacking statistical abilities, but then there probably other readers out there with the same problem.

1. Table 1: what are the p-values illustrating? Trend? Difference between which groups? If they are not for trend, you should not write in the discussion, that “the trend was more evident….”

2. Table 2: What is the reference point? You write aggregating “all other levels” – does that mean one cell compared to the other 8? If so, it does not make sense to me.

3. Table 3: What are the odds ratios of? The LBP being due to sport? In that case, how can you have an odds ratio for the ones without LBP? And again: what is the reference?

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests’