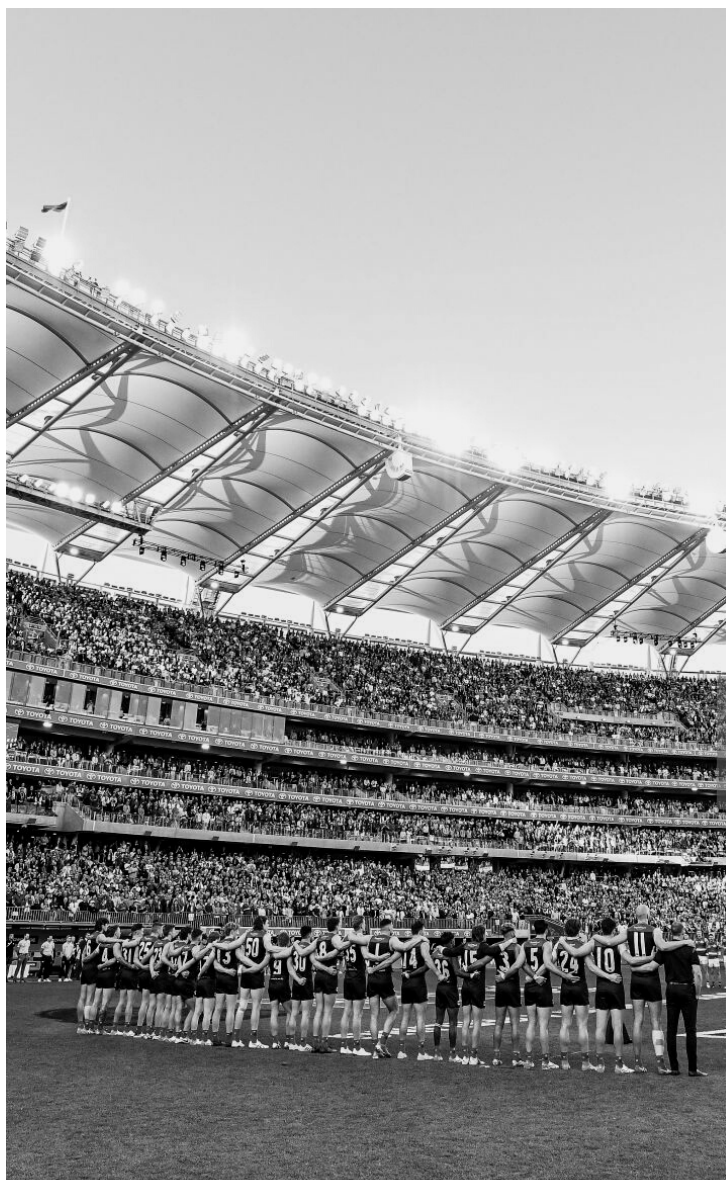


2021  
AFL  
INJURY  
SNAPSHOT

TRACKADEMIC





## 2021 AFL INJURY SNAPSHOT

With the AFL's official 2020 injury report only available in an abbreviated format via written request to the league office, independent and accessible analysis is more important than ever.

This unofficial 2021 AFL Injury Snapshot provides an overview of the key game injury trends from the home and away season.

Joel Mason, PhD

**TRACKADEMIC**

[www.trackademicblog.com](http://www.trackademicblog.com)

This snapshot only considers game injuries, and therefore the burden of training injuries has not been analysed. All game injury data is sourced from match reports located on [AFL.com.au](http://AFL.com.au). This extracted data has been reviewed by an independent and blinded researcher, and therefore any inaccuracies in injury rates are likely due to reporting errors by the AFL or by the clubs.

## DATA STATEMENT

# GAME INJURY SUMMARY

**TOTAL  
INJURIES**

**1.49**  
PER GAME



**+17.3%**  
FROM 2020

**HAMSTRING  
INJURIES**

**.31**  
PER GAME



**-6.1%**  
FROM 2020

**CONCUSSIONS**

**.24**  
PER GAME

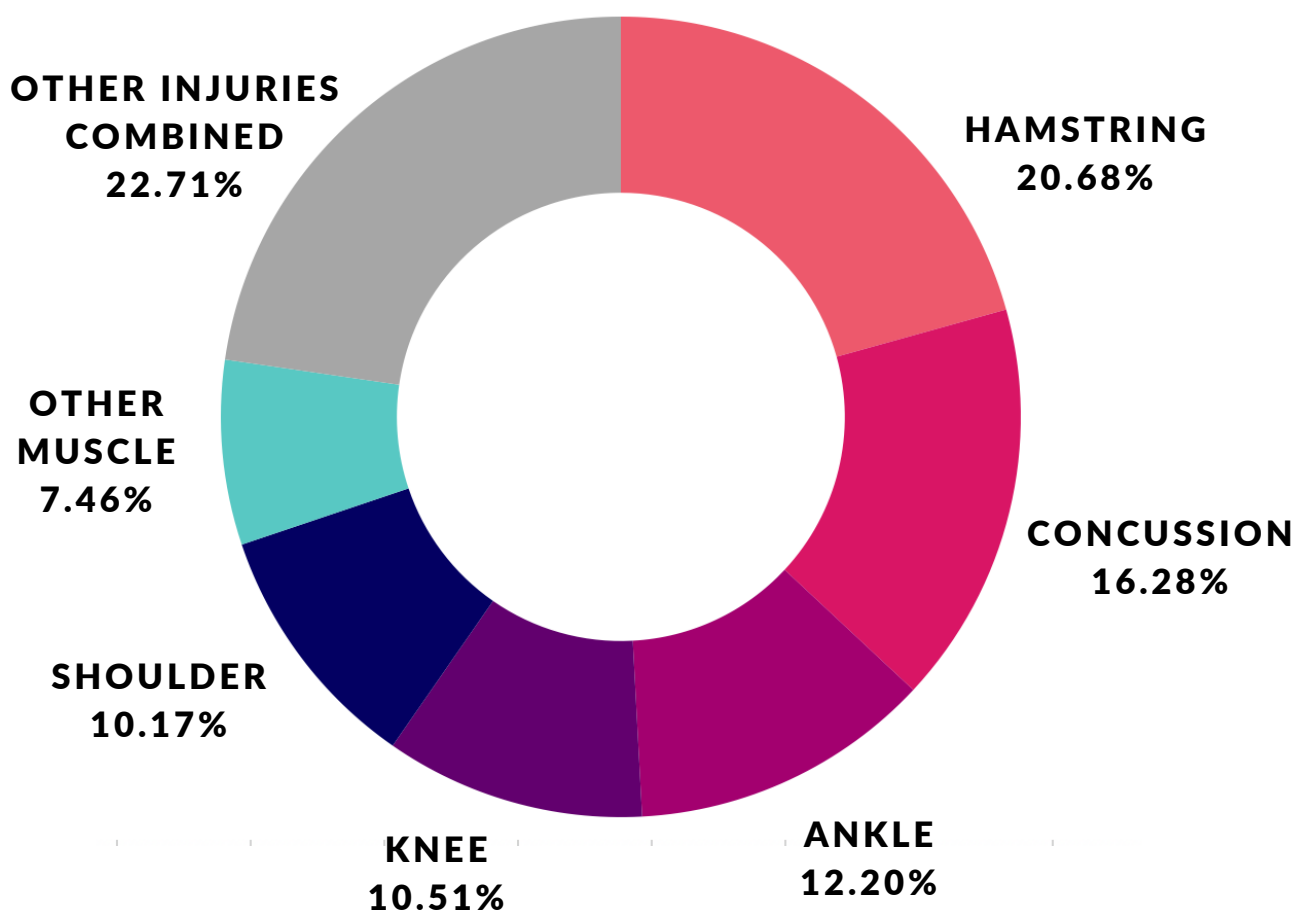


**+41.1%**  
FROM 2020

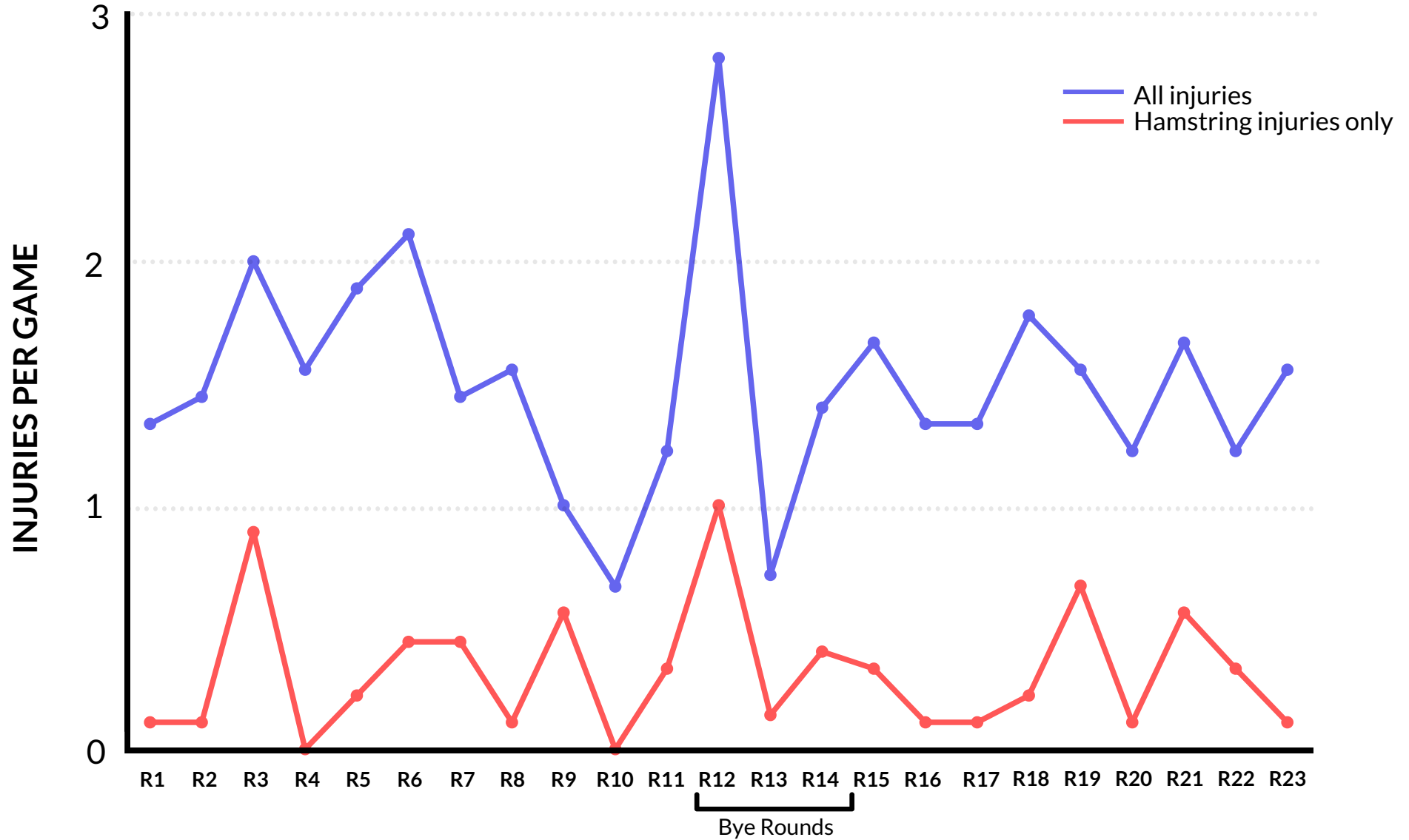
*Data not scaled for the 20% reduction in gametime during the 2020 season.*

# MOST COMMON INJURY LOCATIONS

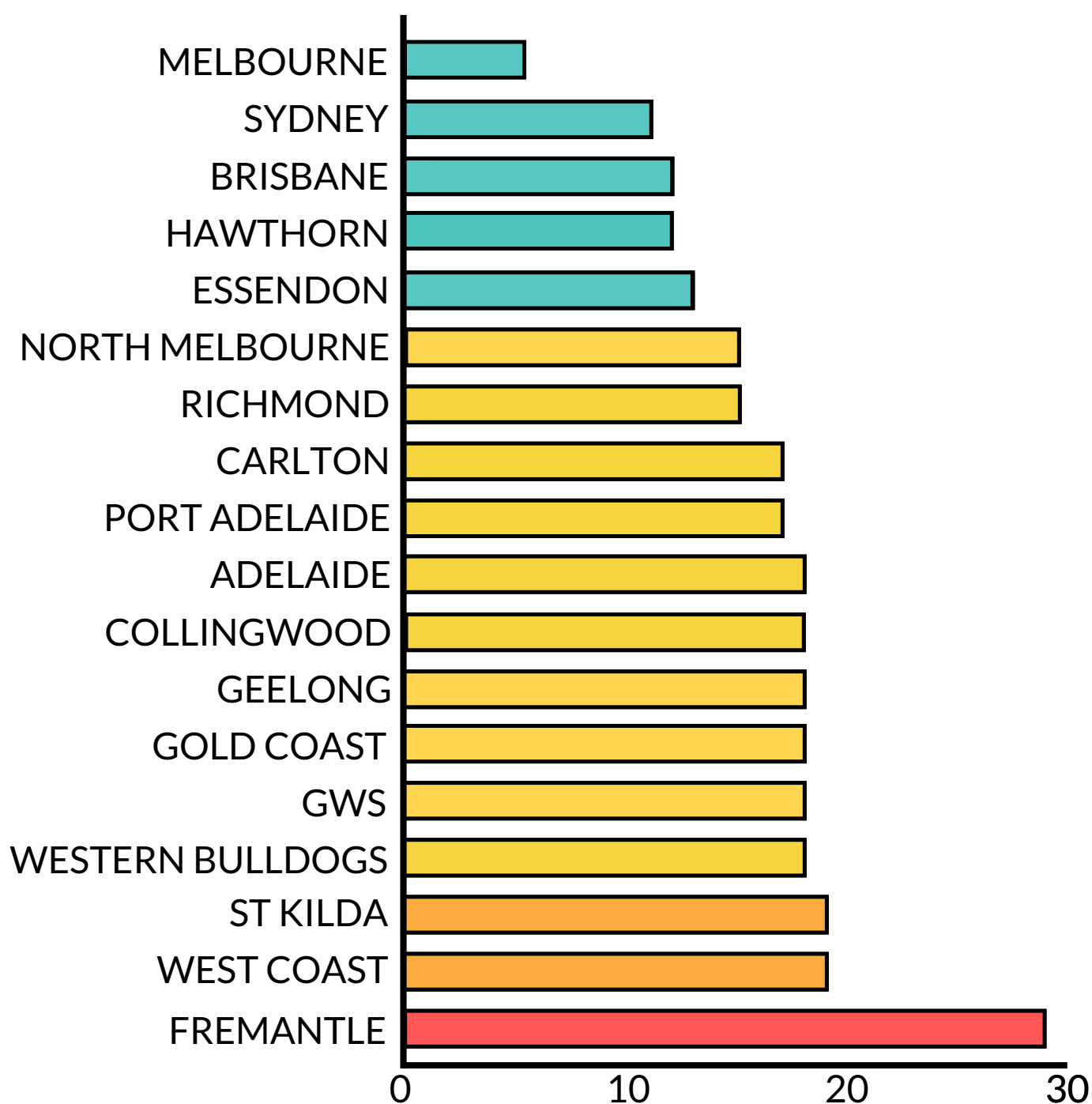
Unsurprisingly, hamstrings retained top spot on the injury list for 2021, accounting for **20.68%** of all injuries (down from 26.2% in 2020 but up from 15.8% in 2019). Despite increasing efforts to protect the head, concussion continues to be a concern, accounting for **16.28%** of all game injuries (up from 13.3% in 2020 despite an increase in total game injuries).



# GAME INJURY RATE BY ROUND

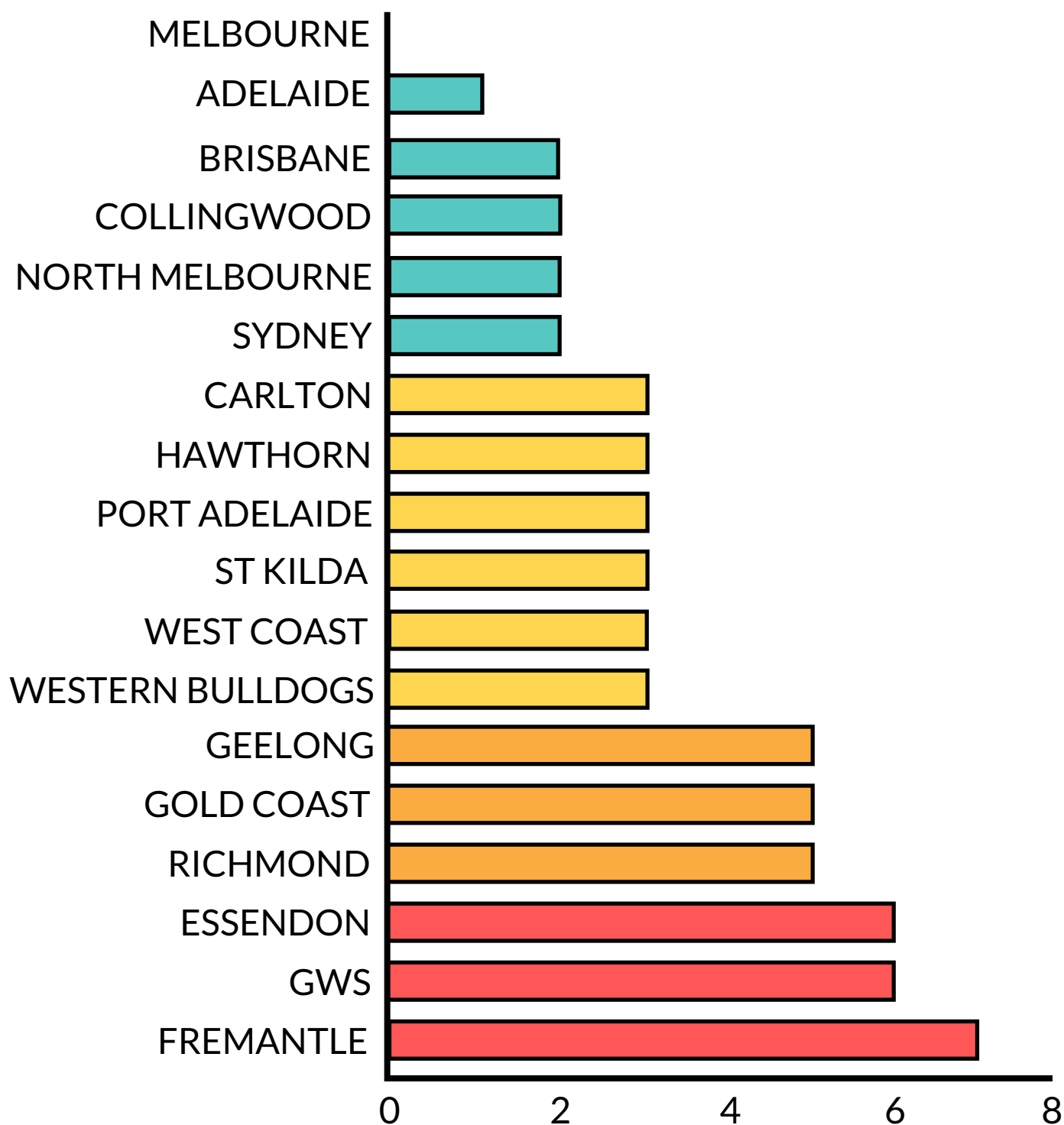


# GAME INJURIES BY TEAM



*Likely impacted by differences in post-game reporting protocols between teams.*

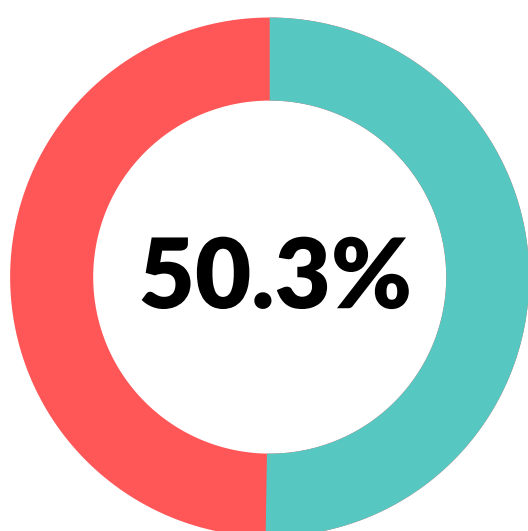
# GAME HAMSTRING INJURIES BY TEAM



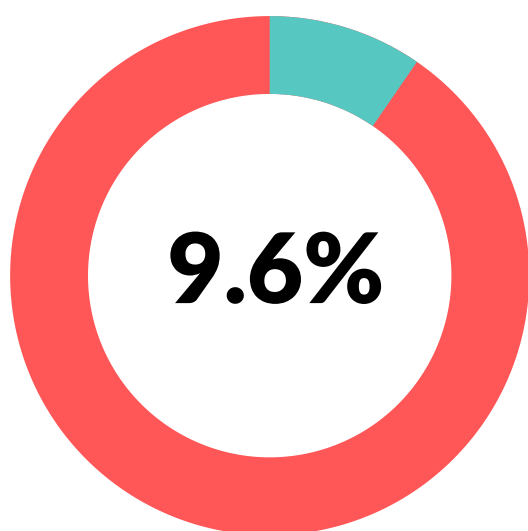
*Likely impacted by differences in post-game reporting protocols between teams.*

# MEDICAL SUBSTITUTE USE

Less than 48hrs before the opening bounce of the season, the AFL announced a new rule allowing teams to replace an injured player with a substitute. There were fears that teams would weaponise the new rule for a set of fresh legs, and although the initial data suggests that it was often used in earnest, a number of teams pushed the boundaries.



50.3% of available medical substitutes were used in the home and away season.



9.6% of the players subbed off due to medical reasons played the following week\*, with one team alone responsible for 22.2% of these early returns.

*\*Adjusted for the bye rounds and round 23*

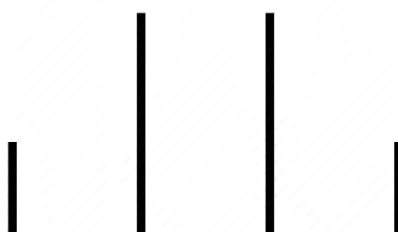


# A FINAL WORD

The league took a promising step forward when they mandated a 12-day concussion protocol, but the volume of head knocks this season is sobering. There's a long-standing belief that reducing concussion rates will ultimately come down to a decision between protecting the head vs protecting the game, but protecting the head *is* protecting the game by protecting the game's most valuable assets. The onus is on the AFL to do better, and with recent payouts to former players totalling approximately \$2,000,000 and the appointment of a number of concussion experts as AFL executives, don't be surprised to see more changes soon.

As for the hamstrings, it's often proposed that they're just part of the game, but some teams having drastically higher hammy rates than others suggests that we have a degree of control. Alongside the usual suspects like appropriate exposure to maximal velocity sprinting and eccentric strength training, a recent focus on sprint technique as a potential injury risk mitigation strategy has emerged. With most AFL teams failing to invest in suitably specialised running coaches, it remains to be seen how quickly progress will be made in this area.

See you in 2022.



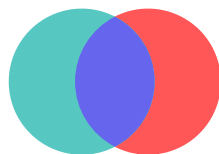


@TRACKADEMIC\_

Snack-Sized Sport Science  
[www.trackademicblog.com](http://www.trackademicblog.com)



@JOELMASONHJ



2021 AFL INJURY SNAPSHOT©