

Comparison of Landing Biomechanics Between Male and Female Dancers and Athletes, Part 2

Influence of Fatigue and Implications for Anterior Cruciate Ligament Injury

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Background: Fatigue is strongly linked to an increased risk of injuries, including anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) ruptures. Part 1 of this study identified differences in the biomechanics of landing from a jump between dancers and team athletes, particularly female athletes, which may explain the epidemiological differences in ACL injuries between dancers and team athletes and the lack of a sex disparity within dancers. However, it is not known if these biomechanical variables change differently between team athletes and dancers in the face of fatigue.

Purpose/Hypothesis: The purpose of this study was to compare dancers' and team athletes' resistance to fatigue and its effect on the biomechanics of single-legged drop landings. The primary hypotheses were that dancers may be more resistant than team athletes to the onset of fatigue and/or may have different biomechanical responses than athletes in landing tasks once fatigue has been achieved.

Study Design: Controlled laboratory study.

Methods: Kinematics and kinetics were recorded as 40 elite modern and ballet dancers (20 men and 20 women) and 40 team sport athletes (20 men and 20 women; National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I-III) performed single-legged drop landings from a 30-cm platform before and after a fatigue protocol consisting of step-ups and vertical jumps. Unfatigued and fatigued joint kinematics and kinetics were compared between groups and sexes with multivariate analyses of variance, followed by pairwise *t* tests as appropriate.

Results: Dancers took longer ($P = .023$) than team athletes to reach a similar state of fatigue. Multiple kinetic (eg, increased peak knee valgus moment; $P < .001$) and kinematic (eg, increased lateral and forward trunk flexion; $P < .001$ and $P = .002$, respectively) parameters of landing changed with fatigue, such that both fatigued dancers and athletes landed with mechanics that were more at risk for ACL injuries as compared with before fatigue.

Conclusion: Dancers took significantly longer to reach fatigue than team athletes. Female athletes consistently exhibited landing patterns associated with a risk for ACL injuries when compared with the other 3 groups. Fatigue changed landing mechanics similarly in both dancers and athletes, such that all groups landed with worse alignment after being fatigued.

Clinical Relevance: Dancers are more resistant to lower extremity fatigue than athletes, and this may partially explain the lower incidence of ACL injuries in both male and female dancers compared to team athletes. The extensive training in landing technique and daily practice that dancers undergo from a young age may be responsible for the higher levels of endurance.

Keywords: anterior cruciate ligament; neuromuscular risk factors; biomechanics; dancers; fatigue

Multiple variables have been linked with varying degrees of strength to an increased risk of noncontact anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) injuries in athletes, including suboptimal

neuromuscular activation leading to poor limb and trunk alignment,^{1,9,16,18,24,30,70} environmental and psychodynamic elements such as object handling or decision-making management of unanticipated events,^{7,13,19,25} and effects of fatigue.[¶]

Although there is currently a lack of direct epidemiological evidence demonstrating that fatigue increases the risk of ACL injuries, there are several types of evidence suggesting the validity of this relationship. Fatigue significantly decreases muscular force development and contraction velocity, increasing the forces seen by passive tissues,^{5,23,28} adversely alters kinematics and neural feedback,^{37,38,40,41,51,63} and adversely affects joint stability.^{6,21,53,60,61,69} In addition, fatigue has been shown to significantly diminish dynamic balance control,^{39,43} which is a variable strongly associated with an increased injury risk.^{15,34,35,36,48}

More directly relevant to ACL injuries, numerous studies have shown that ACL noncontact injuries occur more frequently during a game or performance than practice, as well as closer to the end of the day and season, suggesting an effect of fatigue over time.[#] Importantly, relative to ACL injuries and fatigue, several research groups have shown, in laboratory studies examining the biomechanics of jump landings in athletes, that fatigue results in landing mechanics that mimic the position of risk for ACL ruptures.^{13,17,24,49,50}

There are 2 reasons suggesting that a study of dancers in comparison with athletes may yield important information relative to fatigue. First, dancers suffer considerably fewer ACL injuries than athletes participating in team ball sports,⁴⁴ which may be explained by the major differences between the environments of sport versus dance (eg, equipment handling, anticipatory events) or by the specialized training that dancers undergo from a young age. However, dance is an activity rife with single-legged jump landings, which is the primary mechanism of injury for noncontact ACL injuries,^{44,46,50} and Meuffels and Verhaar⁵⁰ found that dancers who are at risk for noncontact ACL injuries are those who are most exposed to jumps. For those ACL injuries that do occur in dancers, fatigue may play a role as, like athletes, their ACL injuries happen most often late in the day and season.⁴⁴

Second, unlike team athletes, there is no sex disparity in the rates of ACL noncontact injuries in dancers.^{44,50} This lack of a sex disparity in dancers relative to ACL injury rates may be partially explained by our previous work, which found that, in contrast to athletes, male and female dancers do not land differently from one another during a drop landing task,⁵⁵ and by the recent work by our group⁵⁶ and others,⁴ which demonstrated that dancers and athletes exhibit biomechanical differences when performing landing tasks. To date, however, there has been no study that has attempted to differentiate responses to fatigue between dancers and team athletes, which may partially explain the lower rates of ACL injuries in

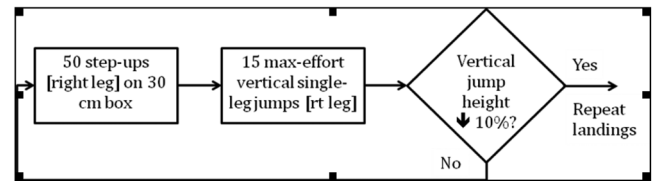


Figure 1. Flowchart of fatigue protocol.

dancers. Additionally, to our knowledge, there have been no studies that have explored fatigue as a factor relative to the sex disparity differences between these 2 groups.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to compare dancers' and team athletes' resistance to fatigue and the biomechanics of a jump landing task before and after achieving fatigue relative to the risk variables associated with the ligament dominance, quadriceps dominance, and trunk dominance theories as described in our part I companion article (see the previous article in this issue).⁵⁶ We hypothesized that dancers would be more resistant than team athletes to the onset of fatigue and/or would have different biomechanical responses than these athletes in landing tasks once fatigue has been achieved. We also were interested in exploring whether responses to fatigue relative to sex would be different across groups and provide useful information relative to the known lack of an ACL injury sex disparity in dancers.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants

Forty dancers (20 men, 20 women) and 40 team sport athletes (20 men, 20 women) were recruited to participate in this study. All participants completed a medical history questionnaire and signed an informed consent form approved by the Institutional Review Board. Demographic information including height, weight, and age at the time of testing as well as inclusion criteria can be found in the companion article within this issue.⁵⁶

Drop Landings

The drop landing task and motion analysis methodology are described in our companion article.⁵⁶

Fatigue Protocol

Before commencement of the experiment, each participant first practiced and then performed 3 maximal vertical

#References 22, 26, 27, 29, 42, 44, 45, 65, 66.

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TABLE 1
Data Analyzed for the Ligament Dominance Theory^a

	Male Dancers	Male Athletes	Female Dancers	Female Athletes
Peak knee abduction angle, ^b deg				
Before	-2.1 ± 1.1	-2.5 ± 1.1	0.5 ± 1.1	4.9 ± 1.0
After	-2.5 ± 1.0	-1.9 ± 1.3	0.9 ± 0.8	4.9 ± 0.9
Knee abduction angle at IC, deg				
Before	-4.3 ± 0.8	-3.9 ± 0.8	-2.2 ± 0.7	0.3 ± 0.8
After	-4.2 ± 0.6	-4.1 ± 0.9	-2.1 ± 0.6	0.8 ± 0.9
Peak knee abduction moment, ^c N·m/kg				
Before	0.08 ± 0.04	0.04 ± 0.03	0.01 ± 0.04	0.13 ± 0.07
After	0.14 ± 0.07	0.04 ± 0.05	0.07 ± 0.04	0.14 ± 0.06
Peak hip adduction angle, deg				
Before	-0.2 ± 1.2	-1.2 ± 1.1	1.7 ± 1.1	2.9 ± 1.3
After	-0.1 ± 1.1	-1.2 ± 1.1	3.2 ± 1.3	3.0 ± 1.3
Hip adduction angle at IC, deg				
Before	-9.1 ± 1.0	-9.7 ± 1.1	-10.6 ± 0.9	-7.9 ± 1.2
After	-9.2 ± 1.2	-10.3 ± 1.1	-10.9 ± 1.0	-8.0 ± 1.3
Peak hip adduction moment, ^{b,c} N·m/kg				
Before	3.4 ± 0.2	3.2 ± 0.2	2.4 ± 0.2	3.1 ± 0.1
After	3.0 ± 0.2	3.0 ± 0.2	2.4 ± 0.2	3.0 ± 0.2
Peak hip IR angle, ^c deg				
Before	1.2 ± 1.0	0.3 ± 0.9	-2.8 ± 1.5	-4.5 ± 1.3
After	2.8 ± 1.6	3.1 ± 1.6	-0.9 ± 1.7	-3.0 ± 1.6
Hip IR angle at IC, ^c deg				
Before	-3.7 ± 1.7	-4.7 ± 1.1	-10.8 ± 1.7	-9.4 ± 1.3
After	-1.8 ± 2.0	-3.3 ± 1.6	-8.0 ± 1.7	-8.1 ± 1.4
Peak hip IR moment, ^c N·m/kg				
Before	0.6 ± 0.1	0.6 ± 0.1	0.6 ± 0.1	0.6 ± 0.1
After	0.7 ± 0.1	0.7 ± 0.1	0.7 ± 0.1	0.7 ± 0.1

^aData are expressed as mean ± standard error of the mean. IC, initial contact; IR, internal rotation.

^bSignificant for group × sex interaction.

^cSignificant effect of fatigue.

TABLE 2
Data Analyzed for the Trunk Dominance Theory^a

	Male Dancers	Male Athletes	Female Dancers	Female Athletes
Lateral trunk lean, ^b deg				
Before	4.2 ± 0.6	5.9 ± 0.6	2.5 ± 0.7	5.2 ± 0.7
After	5.3 ± 0.6	7.7 ± 1.0	3.3 ± 0.7	6.7 ± 0.7
Forward trunk flexion, ^b deg				
Before	-4.4 ± 1.5	0.6 ± 1.5	-1.4 ± 0.4	-0.5 ± 1.2
After	-0.5 ± 1.8	5.3 ± 2.2	2.3 ± 1.7	0.4 ± 1.4

^aData are expressed as mean ± standard error of the mean. For lateral lean, a positive value indicates lean to the right.

^bSignificant effect of fatigue and of group.

single-legged jumps to determine his or her maximal single-legged jump height using the Vertec Jump Measure Performance Device (Gill Athletics, Champaign, Illinois, USA). Participants performed sets of a stepping and jumping protocol designed to induce fatigue until a 10% decrement in their vertical jump height was documented. The fatigue protocol consisted of 50 step-ups onto a 30-cm box, followed by 15 maximal-effort single-legged vertical jumps. At the end of each set, participants' maximum vertical jump height was assessed, and participants rated their subjective sensation of fatigue using the Borg CR-10 scale.¹⁰⁻¹² If fatigue did not occur after the first set of

step-ups and single-legged jumps, participants repeated sets of the fatigue protocol until their maximum vertical jump height was decreased by 10% from baseline. When participants attained a 10% decrement in vertical jump height, they repeated the single-legged drop-jump landings performed before fatigue (Figure 1).

Statistical Analysis

Similarly to our companion article,⁵⁶ 3 separate multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs) were performed. Univariate ANOVAs and pairwise tests were used as post

TABLE 3
Data Analyzed for the Quadriceps Dominance Theory^a

	Male Dancers	Male Athletes	Female Dancers	Female Athletes
Knee flexion angle at IC, ^{b,c} deg				
Before	10.1 ± 1.3	11.5 ± 1.2	10.8 ± 0.9	13.0 ± 1.1
After	9.6 ± 1.1	13.4 ± 1.5	10.0 ± 1.2	14.2 ± 1.3
Peak knee flexion angle, ^d deg				
Before	54.3 ± 1.4	54.2 ± 2.0	57.2 ± 1.6	56.2 ± 1.2
After	57.6 ± 1.7	61.2 ± 3.0	63.8 ± 1.6	60.4 ± 1.9
Peak knee flexion moment, ^d N·m/kg				
Before	2.7 ± 0.1	2.8 ± 0.2	2.5 ± 0.1	2.9 ± 0.1
After	2.4 ± 0.1	2.3 ± 0.3	2.3 ± 0.1	2.9 ± 0.1
Quadriceps:hamstring ratio				
Before	0.95 ± 0.17	0.74 ± 0.16	0.72 ± 0.12	0.50 ± 0.06
After	0.96 ± 0.12	0.79 ± 0.13	0.71 ± 0.07	0.49 ± 0.05

^aData are expressed as mean ± standard error of the mean. IC, initial contact.

^bSignificant for group × fatigue interaction.

^cSignificant effect of group.

^dSignificant effect of fatigue.

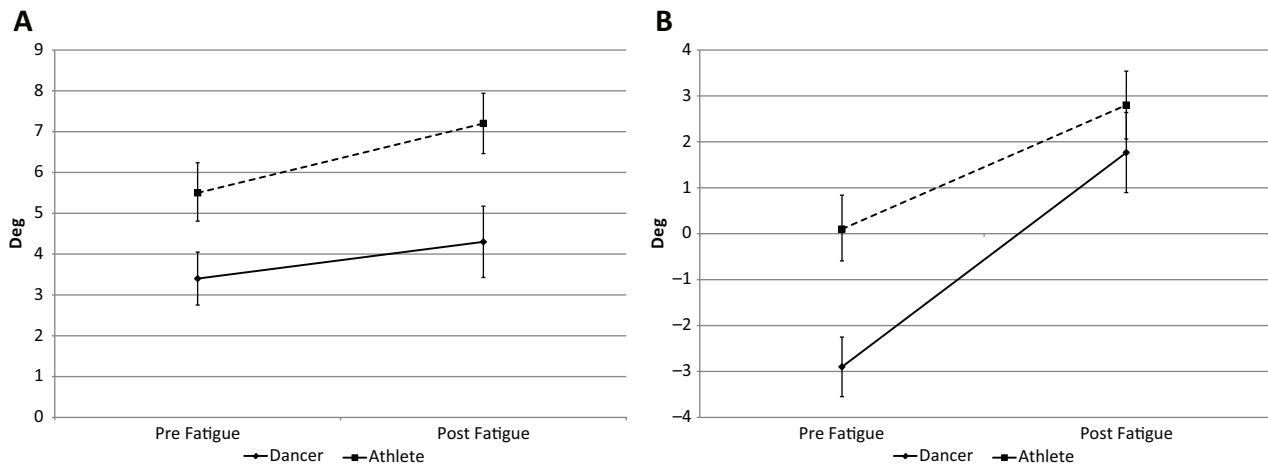


Figure 2. (A) Lateral trunk lean and (B) forward trunk flexion before and after fatigue for dancers and athletes. There were significant main effects of fatigue and of group.

hoc tests when the MANOVA identified statistically significant differences ($P \leq .05$) for the main effects of group (dancers/athletes), sex (male/female), time (before/after fatigue), or their interactions. Additionally, a univariate ANOVA was used to test whether there were differences between groups or sexes on the number of sets of the fatigue protocol required to induce fatigue or in the subjective ratings of fatigue.

RESULTS

Dancers took significantly more exertional bouts to fatigue (approximately 40%) than did team athletes (mean sets of fatigue protocol, 2.7 ± 1.8 vs 1.9 ± 1.3 , respectively; $P = .023$). However, there was no effect of sex ($P = .208$), nor was there a sex × group interaction ($P = .782$). There were no significant main or interaction effects on Borg

CR-10 scale subjective ratings of fatigue achieved, with dancers rating their fatigue as a mean of 7.4 ± 0.3 and athletes as 7.2 ± 0.3 ($P = .755$). Similarly, there was no effect of sex ($P = .157$) or sex × group ($P = .998$).

The MANOVA on the ligament dominance theory showed a main effect of fatigue ($P < .001$). Post hoc testing showed that fatigue increased the peak knee valgus moment ($P = .047$), decreased the peak hip adduction moment ($P = .044$), decreased the hip external rotation angle (at initial contact and peak; $P < .001$ and $P = .002$, respectively) (external rotation is reported here as participants landed in an externally rotated position and progressed toward a position of internal rotation with fatigue), and increased the peak hip internal rotation moment ($P = .001$). There were no interactions with fatigue relative to sex or group. As in our companion article within this issue,⁵⁶ group × sex interactions were significant ($P = .039$), with post hoc tests showing similar results (Table 1).

The MANOVA on the trunk dominance theory showed a main effect of fatigue ($P < .001$). Post hoc tests revealed that fatigue increased both forward trunk flexion ($P = .002$) and lateral trunk lean ($P < .001$). An analysis unrelated to fatigue but that examined the main effect of group was significant ($P < .001$), with results similar to those of our companion study within this issue.⁵⁶ There were no significant interaction effects (Table 2).

The MANOVA on the quadriceps dominance theory showed a group \times fatigue interaction ($P = .043$) and main effects of group ($P = .018$) and fatigue ($P < .001$). Post hoc tests showed that athletes landed with significantly more knee flexion at initial contact than did dancers ($P = .017$). Dancers responded to fatigue by slightly decreasing knee flexion at initial contact, whereas athletes slightly increased knee flexion at initial contact (group \times fatigue interaction; $P = .001$). Fatigue also caused increased peak knee flexion angles ($P < .001$) and decreased knee flexion moments ($P = .003$) during landing (Table 3).

DISCUSSION

To our knowledge, this is the first study to compare the fatigability and landing biomechanics of dancers and team athletes after a fatiguing protocol. The main findings are that (1) dancers required significantly more exercise bouts (almost 40%) to achieve a similar level of fatigue (defined by jumping height decrement and confirmed by subjective ratings) as the athletes; (2) after the fatigue protocol, both dancers and athletes had significantly increased faulty alignment; and (3) fatigue largely had similar effects to both groups and both sexes.

It is unclear why dancers required more exercise bouts to achieve fatigue (as measured by jump height and subjective reports of the perceived level of difficulty). One possibility is the amount of specific jump training that dancers receive. Dancers perform approximately 200 jumps per 1.5 hours in their daily technique class and typically go on to perform more jumps throughout the day during their rehearsals and performances.⁴⁶ Furthermore, dancers begin training before adolescence and are not promoted to the next level of technique class until they master neutral trunk and lower extremity alignment and exemplary balance control.^{44,55} It is possible that the increased resistance to fatigue found in dancers is related to differences in the ACL injury risk between dancers and team athletes. Future studies should use more ecologically valid methods to examine this issue.

In general, participants performed postfatigue landings with increased faulty alignment in biomechanical measures associated with each of the 3 theories examined. These findings may provide a biomechanical explanation to the previously reported suggestion that fatigue is associated with an increased likelihood of ACL injuries. Within the ligament dominance theory, several measures were significantly altered because of fatigue. However, knee valgus and moment are highly correlated⁵² and most clearly associated with ACL injuries,³⁶ and consequently, our discussion focuses on these variables relative to the ligament dominance theory.

Our findings are in agreement with those of Chappell et al,¹⁷ who reported an increased knee valgus moment after fatigue in athletes; the present study extends these findings to dancers. Other studies did not find an effect of fatigue on knee valgus.^{8,14,57,58} The explanation for this discrepancy may have been described in the conclusions of a recent systematic review,⁶² which reported wide variability in the methodology used to collect biomechanical variables as well as in the fatigue protocols used between studies. It is also important to note that some studies found trends but not statistical significance for some of the variables.^{57,58} The current study provides additional data on the effects of fatigue that can be used in a meta-analysis that will provide more conclusive answers. Additionally, the current study provides novel data on the effects of fatigue on the biomechanics of landing in dancers, which have not been previously reported.

Similarly, we found increased faulty trunk posture after fatigue (Figure 2). To our knowledge, this is the first study of drop landings that focused on trunk kinematics after a functional fatigue protocol. Thus, no direct comparisons can be made with other studies. However, a study on fire-fighters investigating the effect of fatigue on firefighting tasks also found increased trunk flexion after fatigue.³¹ The findings from these 2 studies should be interpreted as preliminary, but they suggest that trunk posture, which has a large effect on the center of mass, deteriorates after fatigue. It is also important to note that landing from a jump is a complex task. The response of the locomotor system to fatigue may be difficult to discern when looking at individual biomechanical variables. For example, we found that participants landed with decreased hip adduction after fatigue, which may be related to the significant finding for increased lateral trunk lean after fatigue. We speculate that athletes and dancers lean the trunk to the supporting leg side in an attempt to control undesirable forces along the lower extremity, and as a consequence, the contralateral pelvis moves superiorly, creating decreased hip adduction. This compensatory mechanism has been previously suggested as a possible explanation in a similar study that also found decreased hip adduction moments,⁵⁹ although the investigators did not measure trunk kinematics. The complex interplay between the trunk and lower extremity after fatigue needs to be further explored by studies that also use full-body marker systems and evaluate multiple joints.

Of the 3 biomechanical models used for the analysis (ligament, quadriceps, and trunk dominance theories), only 1, the quadriceps dominance theory, showed a significant fatigue \times group interaction. Taking into consideration that the difference in knee flexion after fatigue was of a very small magnitude (0.7° in dancers and 1.5° in athletes) and that knee flexion was 1 of 15 examined variables, we suggest that these findings support the view that the biomechanical responses of dancers and team athletes to a drop landing task are not significantly different once the state of neuromuscular fatigue has been reached.

The primary hypothesis of this study was that fatigue would create significant differences between team athletes and dancers, providing information to explain the differences in ACL injuries between these groups. However, we found

that fatigue had a similar effect on both groups by increasing the presence of faulty mechanics associated with ACL injuries. Effects of fatigue are multifactorial, and a study of this nature that is focused exclusively on a selected array of biomechanical variables may not capture factors related to fatigue that are associated with an ACL injury risk. Several authors suggest that much evidence exists in support of there being a temporal nature to the occurrence of ACL noncontact injuries, specifically when training intensities are highest, cumulative features of combined physiological mechanisms from central and peripheral levels occur, and athletes succumb to the mental and physiological demands of the game.^{32,33,49} Previous research on dancers^{44,45} and athletes^{20,64,67,68} that has looked at both physiological and psychodynamic variables in relation to injuries or performance outcomes supports this assertion. Therefore, we suggest that future research incorporate a biopsychosocial approach to better understand which athletes in any given activity are most vulnerable to an ACL injury risk.

The secondary hypothesis of this study, that dancers would be more resistant to the onset of fatigue, was supported in that we found dancers required 40% more exertional bouts to reach the same state of fatigue as team athletes. This raises the possibility that the reason that dancers suffer fewer ACL injuries may be that they are more resistant to fatigue and its deleterious effects on alignment.

CONCLUSION

Fatigue had a significant effect on biomechanical variables across all 3 foci of analysis, although there were no significant differences in biomechanical responses to fatigue between team athletes and dancers. However, dancers took significantly longer to reach fatigue than did athletes, suggesting that future research examine fatigue resistance as a potential explanation for differences in ACL injury rates between team athletes and dancers.

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