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# Restarting the 2021 International 60+ Masters Small-Sided Football World Cup in Denmark During the Covid-19 Pandemic



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**Introduction:** In the context of the current global Covid-19 pandemic, coaches and international event leaders around the world are mindful of the added health and safety needs of grassroots seniors' (55-70+) athletes. As part of the strategic organizational leadership for the restart of the 2021 International Masters 5-a-side Football World Cup in Denmark, case study research methodology was employed over a 4-month period to develop a customised and evidence-based Covid-19 safety protocol for this annual event. Drawing on analyses of relevant documentation (e.g., WHO, FIFA and Danish Health Ministry Covid-19 guidelines) and focus group interviews with key multi-disciplinary and multinational tournament stakeholder representatives (e.g., medical doctors, tournament host leaders, football scholars, match officials, volunteer coaches and players), this paper highlights key findings for implementing a strategic safety protocol during the Covid-19 pandemic for the 2-day International 60+ Masters Small-Sided Football World Cup Tournament in Denmark, 2021. Due to rapidly changing Covid-19 pandemic circumstances during the months of tournament planning and writing this article, the following strategies are intended relevant and customised measures for consideration. Ultimately, implementation will be based on Danish Government regulations, football association recommendations, and practical possibilities at the time of the international tournament, thus requiring constant adjustment (including alternative strategies) according to the situation:

## ***Pre-tournament Travel Assessments***

- Check WHO guidelines;

- Check Danish and national government travel advisory and restrictions (e.g., pre-trip vaccinations and/or pre-during-post tournament Covid-19 testing requirements);
- Check airline, travel agent, hotel and insurance advisory and restrictions;
- Check FIFA/DFA & host Club football advisory and restrictions;
- All tournament attendees are required to consult their primary care providers/GPs about any personal health risks that need to be considered (Covid-19 related and non-Covid-19 related diseases).

## ***On-site Tournament Leadership***

- The 2-day international tournament will strictly adhere to Danish Government/FIFA/DFA/host Football Club Covid-19 related health and safety regulations and guidance to minimise risks of spread of common infective diseases, such as common cold, influenza and the Covid-19 virus
- For tracing purposes, only teams, players, officials and guests that have been registered with the international tournament committee prior to the event may attend the 2-day tournament and masters football research symposium
- Host club officials, including the designated Covid-19 health and safety officer, medical doctor(s) and volunteer staff, will provide regular public health reminders, rules and communications throughout the event, such as whether players and match officials are required to wear face covers and maintain 1.5m physical distancing



(e.g., 3-touch only ball rule) during warm-ups and competitive games.

## ***On-Site Tournament Health Assessments***

- Covid-19 risk awareness waivers recommended by Danish authorities will be collected at onsite registration;
- If authorised by Danish authorities, tournament attendees will be required to demonstrate a negative Covid-19 test document within 3 days prior to entry to the tournament venue;
- Tournament attendees experiencing any Covid-19 symptoms or are at risk, will not be permitted in the tournament venue;
- All tournament attendees will receive health screening via a questionnaire and touch-less thermometer that must record below 37.7oC (100.4 oF) to enter the tournament venue each day.

## ***On-site Tournament Facilities***

- Dressing room and shower facilities will not be open at the host venue. Tournament participants will change clothes prior to entering the tournament venue and outside the venue after each day of games. Tournament participants are required to bring their own towels and water bottles (any water bottles left behind will be discarded at the end of each day). Toilet facilities will be regularly sanitised during the 2-day event, and hand sanitiser will be widely available at the tournament venue for the use of all those in attendance;
- The indoor host Club venue will be closed for group meetings. All presentation/group meeting areas will be conducted outdoors, and the 'Entry' and 'Exit' points at the venue will be modified with increased signage to facilitate 1-way traffic flow;
- Match officials and volunteer staff will wipe down football equipment with disinfectant before and after use; balls will be properly spaced to support 1.5m physical distancing guidelines; and, tournament participants will warm-up and

cool-down on separate pitches (one per team) for the same reason.

## ***On-site Tournament Physical Distancing***

- All tournament attendees (spectators, volunteers, club staff, players, officials etc) must adhere to physical distancing guidance and remain 1.5 meters apart, as well as, use hand-washing hygiene and wear face covers at the tournament venue where appropriate;
- Tournament spectators will be located in separate marked areas at the host venue allowing no contact with tournament participants;
- Tournament teams will arrive at the host venue at specified time-slots and will stay in specified (marked) areas. Each team will move as a group from their designated area to a scheduled game and avoid any on-or-off-pitch physical contact with opponents (including handshakes etc) and officials. Team benches will be placed on each side of the pitch;
- In order to avoid exposed time to opponents or team mates during small-sided games, players will be required to execute sideline kicks within a 2-second maximum, and execute corner kicks within a 5-second maximum;
- Minor injuries will be self-treated where appropriate, otherwise first-aid/trainer/medical personnel will be equipped with appropriate protection to provide assistance.



## Summary

Significant developments and commitments to modified safety protocols have been made in order to meet the unique age-related health and safety needs and circumstances of competitive seniors' athletes in the 2-day international 60+ Masters Small-sided Football World Cup in Denmark, 2021. Data suggest that adapted safety-protocols for amateur/grassroots international 60+ seniors football events during the Covid-19 pandemic focus on responsive age-appropriate risk assessment practices, as well as related concerns such as facilities, equipment, travel, budgeting and restricted-play adaptations for limited physical contact. Furthermore, critical leadership contributions (inclusive of multinational stakeholder representatives and complex "Plan B-D contingencies), key organizational supports, and evidence-based practice is essential for the science, politics, and art of implementation .

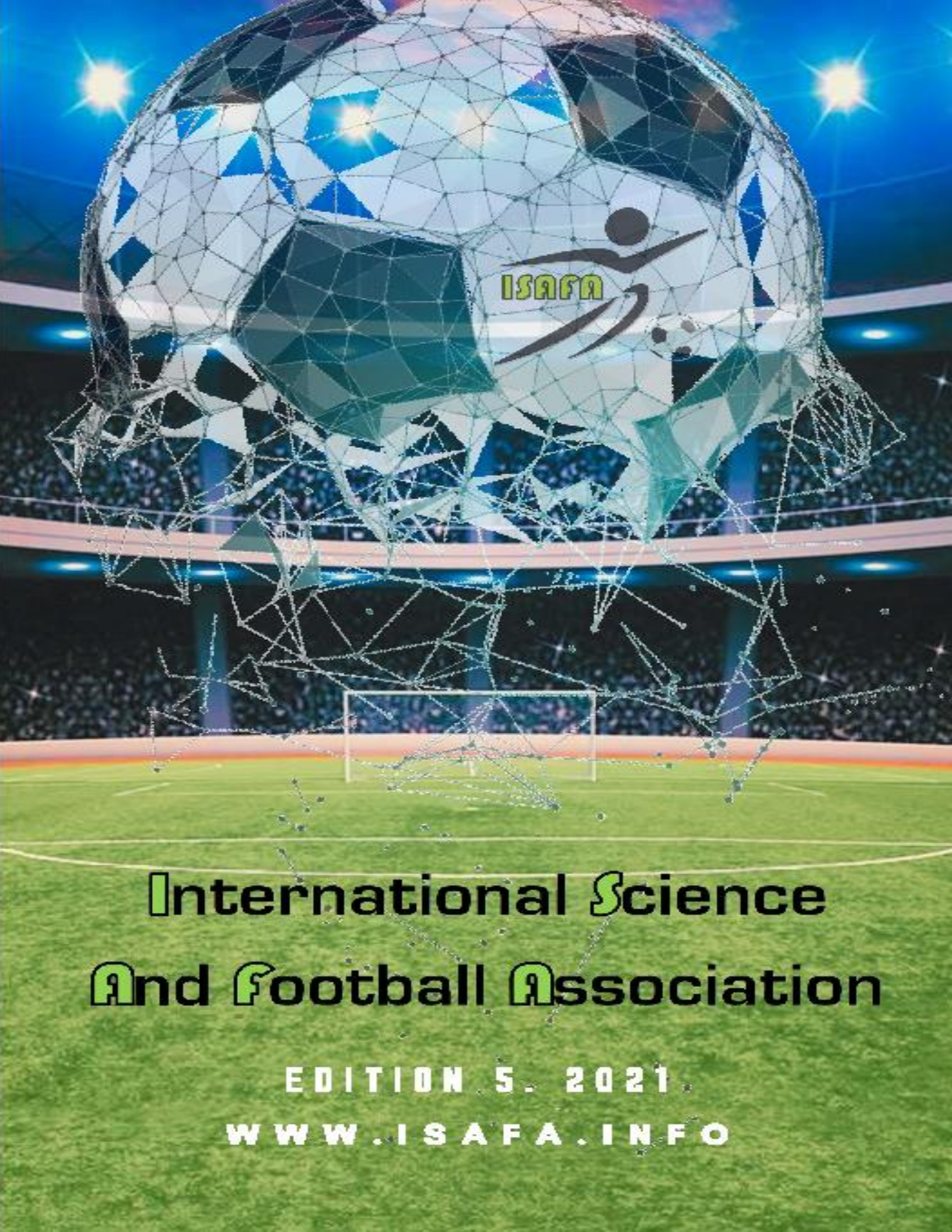


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