“A bite inflicted by a human can have serious health implications”

An interview with former FIFA-appointed dentist Dr Dietrich Fischer-Brooks

During the last two months, 52 football teams from around the globe were competing for the World Cup trophy in Brazil. Dental Tribune Group Editor Daniel Zimmermann had the opportunity to speak with Dr Dietrich Fischer-Brooks from Germany, a former FIFA-appointed dentist who also provides dental care for German Bundesliga club Eintracht Frankfurt, about the oral health of players and why the infamous bite inflicted by Uruguayan superstar Luis Suárez during his team’s match against Italy could have rather serious implications for his opponent.

Daniel Zimmermann: Dr Fischer-Brooks, the biting incident involving Luis Suárez has made headlines during this year’s World Cup tournament. In addition to a long-term ban, could this incident have any implications for his oral health?

Dr Dieter Fischer-Brooks: Only for his Italian opponent, Giorgio Chiellini. A wide variety of harmful bacteria live in the oral cavity and a bite inflicted by a human can have serious health implications. I know of some serious infections that have resulted from such bites.

Suárez appeared to have suffered from pain directly after the incident. Was this real or just an act?

I believe that this was just an act. Upon realising that he had been bitten, the Italian would likely have struck out at Suárez, but whether he really hit Suárez is subject to speculation. Would you have recommended that Suárez visit a dentist after the game?

Only if he had really been struck on the mouth. Shortly afterwards, I saw him giving an interview, however, which indicates that it could not have been that bad.

Are elbow impacts a frequent cause of dental injuries in football?

Definitely. Many of the players I treat here in Frankfurt on a regular basis have sustained injuries to their anterior teeth at some time in their career. Therefore, many players wear mouth guards while playing. One often sees them during post-match interviews. Do players have to undergo dental check-ups during a tournament like the World Cup or is oral health considered their personal responsibility?

This really depends on the professionalism of the staff. As a principle, players should be checked in advance of the tournament for any signs of infections in the mouth, or in the jaw and face area.

Cases of players suffering sudden cardiac death on the pitch are not uncommon. In many of these cases, the cause was a serious infection, which may have resulted from dental problems, including infected third molars, severe periodontitis or infections in endodontically treated teeth, to name a few.

If a tooth knocked out, would you perform extensive dental treatment on them?

Definitely. Many of the players I treat here in Frankfurt on a regular basis have sustained injuries to their anterior teeth at some time in their career. Therefore, many players wear mouth guards while playing. One often sees them during post-match interviews.

Owing to your work, do you see any differences with regard to oral health care as practised in Germany or Switzerland, for example, in comparison to other professional football clubs?

Aesthetics is one thing, but there are significant inequalities internationally. Dental care (similar to general health care) in England, for example, is not the best. This is evident in the poor state of dentition, including defective fillings and other signs of second-rate dentistry. High-quality oral health care as practised in Germany or Switzerland, for example, is not common.

Thank you very much for the interview.