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Comparison of strategies and performance of functional electrical stimulation cycling in spinal cord injury pilots for competition in the first ever CYBATHLON

Christine Azevedo Coste (1), Vance Bergeron (2), Rik Berkelmans (3), Emerson Fachin Martins (4), Ché Fornusek (5), Arnin Jetsada (6), Kenneth J. Hunt (7), Raymond Tong (8), Ronald Triolo (9), Peter Wolf (10)

(1) INRIA / LIRMM, Montpellier, France; (2) ENS Lyon, France; (3) Berkelmans, BerkelBike BV, Netherlands; (4) NTAAI / UnB, Brasilia, Brazil; (5) EXSS, University of Sydney, Australia; (6) Department of Biomedical Engineering, Mahidol University, Thailand; (7) Institute for Rehabilitation and Performance Technology, Bern University of Applied Sciences, Switzerland; (8) Dept of Biomedical Engineering, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, China; (9) Case Western Reserve University and the Louis Stokes Cleveland Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Cleveland, USA; (10) Sensory-Motor Systems Lab, ETH Zurich, Switzerland

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Abstract

Functional Electrical Stimulation (FES) can elicit muscular contraction and restore motor function in paralyzed limbs. FES is a rehabilitation technique applied to various sensorimotor deficiencies and in different functional situations, e.g., grasping, walking, standing, transfer, cycling and rowing. FES can be combined with mechanical devices. FES-assisted cycling is mainly used in clinical environments for training sessions on cycle ergometers, but it has also been adapted for mobile devices, usually tricycles. In October 2016, twelve teams participated in the CYBATHLON competition in the FES-cycling discipline for persons with motor-complete spinal cord injury. It was the first event of this kind and a wide variety of strategies, techniques and designs were employed by the different teams in the competition. The approaches of the teams are detailed in this special issue. We hope that the knowledge contained herein, together with recent positive results of FES for denervated degenerating muscles, will provide a solid basis to encourage improvements in FES equipment and open new opportunities for many patients in need of safe and effective FES management. We hope to see further developments and/or the benefit of new training strategies at future FES competitions, e.g. at the Cybathlon 2020 (www.cybathlon.ethz.ch).

Key Words: spinal cord injury, FES cycling, FES for denervated muscles, competition context, CYBATHLON

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As participants in this competition, we believe it is important for our community to document the scientific and technological approaches used by the different teams in order to help advance our understanding of FES-cycle training and racing strategies. We therefore prescribed a number of important aspects to be analyzed by each team in order to allow for a synthesis and comparison between solutions and performance. The articles in this EJTM special issue, FES Cycling/Cybathlon, introduce case studies gathering multidisciplinary points of view and approaches. These case studies may serve as a starting point to overcome current and future challenges. FES cycling requires several weeks to months of physical preparation to improve the pedalling performance of SCI individuals to reach competition levels. FES cycling is also used in other situations including post-stroke hemiplegia and in the elderly. Furthermore, FES cycling is a sport that can be practised by SCI individuals in whom permanent denervation results in degeneration of muscles (DDM). In the latter case, prevention and even recovery from muscle degeneration can occur if FES for DDM is performed at a 5-day a week training level for several months.

We hope to see further developments and/or the benefit of new training strategies at future FES competitions, e.g. at the Cybathlon 2020 (www.cybathlon.ethz.ch).

List of acronyms
EJTM – European Journal of Translational Myology
FES – Functional Electrical Stimulation
SCI – Spinal Cord Injury
DDM – denervated and degenerating muscle

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All authors designed, implemented and approved the typescript.

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The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Corresponding Author
Christine Azevedo Coste, INRIA / LIRMM, Montpellier, France. E-mail: Christine.azevedo@inria.fr

E-mails of co-authors
Vance Bergeron: vance.bergeron@ens-lyon.fr
Rik Berkelmans: rik@berkelbike.com
Emerson Fachin Martins: emersonntai@gmail.com
Ché Fornusek: che.fornusek@sydney.edu.au
Arnin Jetsada: jetsada.arn@mahidol.ac.th
Kenneth J. Hun: Kenneth.Hunt@bfh.ch
Raymond Tong: kytong@cuhk.edu.hk
Ronald Triolo: ronald.triolo@case.edu
Peter Wolf: peter.wolf@hest.ethz.ch

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