

FOOTBALL COACHES PRESEASON ALERTS

JUNE, 2012

In addition to this football specific material coaches and administrators must review the Fall Sports Coaches Alerts especially regarding heat illness, injury, concussions and conditioning.

| | |
|---|------|
| Risk Minimization and Football Conditioning..... | I |
| Suggestions for Principals & Football Coaches | II |
| Summer Coaching Regulations..... | III |
| Helmet (football) Inspection Checklist..... | IV |
| Rule Changes Summary (Press Release) for 2011 | V |
| Rule Changes and Points of Emphasis for 2011..... | VI |
| Reducing Brain and Spinal Injuries in Football and Other Sports..... | VII |
| Annual Survey of Catastrophic Football Injuries (1931-2010)..... | VIII |
| Go to: WWW.UNC.EDU/DEPTS/NCCSI/ for complete survey | |
| Suggestions for Management of Concussions in Sports..... | IV |

Notes:

Football Helmets and Face Masks: Visible exterior warning labels which detail the risk of injury are mandatory. It is required that helmets and facemasks (properly secured to the helmet) meet the NOCSAE test standard at the time of manufacture.

Catastrophic Insurance: Since 1970-71 the MHSAA has arranged for Catastrophic Athletic Accident Insurance Coverage for eligible participants at each member high school and all registered officials. The program is catastrophic excess accident insurance intended to help pay medical bills to administer to injuries sustained in athletic activities under MHSAA jurisdiction. Details of the coverage and claims administration for 2011-12 are posted on mhsaa.com. Click on "Administrators"

Summer dead period, pre season down: For clarifications click on <http://www.mhsaa.com/resources/deadperiod.pdf> or check the MHSAA *Handbook*.

***Required Football Rules Meetings start July 23, 2012 and end Sept. 6, 2012**

Coaches should also complete a brief online concussion course @ <http://www.mhsaa.com/Schools/HealthSafetyResources.aspx>

TO: Principals, Athletic Directors, Head Football Coaches of MHSAA Member Schools Which Sponsor Football

FROM: John E. Roberts, Executive Director

RE: Risk Minimization and Conditioning for the Sport of Football

DATE: June 2012

It is estimated that there are approximately 1,500,000 participants in high school, junior high school and youth football leagues in the United States. Although statistics reveal that fatalities have decreased markedly since 1976, there is concern that we experienced 14 brain injuries and 8 cervical injuries which resulted in incomplete recovery and 4 fatalities directly related to football in 2011.

It is necessary to remind all that are involved with football programs on the local level to continue to be vigilant in our pursuit for a risk free environment for our students. In those efforts, coaches should be aware of the following:

1. During off-season conditioning, it is more important to stress weight training than passing leagues. The most important weight training is that which focuses not on bulk and bench presses but on strengthening of shoulder, back and neck muscles.
2. During preseason practices, it is imperative to teach proper blocking and tackling techniques, and to prohibit butt blocking, face tackling, spearing and any other activity that makes the head the principal point of contact in blocking and tackling.
3. During games, don't stop teaching. Demand proper techniques of blocking and tackling even during emotionally charged games. Don't send the message that wild, reckless, kamikaze play is especially praiseworthy.
4. At all times, assign player positions sensibly. Don't put younger, slighter, less mature players in positions where they will be more likely to make open-field tackles: at defensive back, or on punt and kick-off coverage teams.
5. No existing football helmet is concussion proof. Proper helmet fit is a major concern and is imperative that athletes, coaches and athletic trainers take an active role in the proper fitting of helmets. Comfort shortcuts are not permitted.

SUGGESTIONS FOR PRINCIPALS AND FOOTBALL COACHES

PRINCIPALS: We are recommending that you discuss the following suggestions with your entire football coaching staff prior to your first football practice in August. Similar subjects should be discussed with coaches of other sports.

1. Point out all foreseeable dangers for each student in football participation.
2. Rules must be followed in every respect. Including required proper fitting, unaltered equipment.
3. Correct procedures, techniques, conditioning, proper equipment fitting must be taught. The coach must be knowledgeable and drills must be conducted with minimal risk. Do not use dangerous drills to demonstrate procedures. Terminology such as "kill", "maim", etc. should be eliminated.
4. Take positive steps when disciplining a student who has violated a rule involving risk factors. Create a minimum risk learning environment.
5. Protect yourself by keeping thorough records. Document practice sessions, schedules, statements, precautions, etc. Inform parents and students regarding instructional procedures involving risk minimization.
6. Establish a set, written procedure in the event of injury during practice and games.

COACHES: We suggest that, at a total squad meeting, coaches have all players place and review the warning labels on the outside lower back part of the helmet and instruct that only certified facemasks may replace the original..

Also, at the team meeting, it would be a good time for the coaches to state the following to the entire squad:

1. Helmets cannot prevent all head and neck injuries (Poster--Attention Football Players). Proper fit is a must.
2. The helmet check is a shared responsibility and all damaged equipment should be reported to the coach. Share with all team members the suggested inspection checklist items (see enclosed).
3. In any sport there is always the chance that someone can be injured and, in a small percentage of cases, a player could sustain a very serious injury.
4. Sparring, butt blocking, and face and head tackling are illegal. The danger in these techniques is that too often the player's head is not in the proper position when contact is made with the opponent. Executed improperly head down, the neck is most vulnerable to injury. A blow to the top of the head when the neck is straightened is the most frequent cause of permanent injury.

Only legal techniques should be taught or practiced. The players should be instructed to keep their heads up and necks bulled when making contact with opponents. The players should be warned about putting their heads down and initiating contact.

1661 Ramblewood Drive • East Lansing, MI 48823-7329 • 517-332-5046 • Fax 517-332-4071 • Web mhsaa.com or mhsaa.net

TO: Head Football Coaches
FROM: John E. Roberts, Executive Director
RE: MHSAA Summer Regulations Regarding Football
DATE: June 2011

See *Handbook* Regulation II, Section 11(H) that will address football activities of coaches and players during the summer.

1. During the summer prior to Friday, August 1, a maximum of seven players at one time may engage in organized competition with their school coach present for a maximum of 7 days (more than seven players may be present on the sideline). In addition, informal activities (with footballs, helmets and football shoes not sleds and dummies) may take place on any number of days during the summer (**not summer dead period**) as long as no more than seven students in grades 7-12 of the district are assembled with a football coach of that district.

These seven days with competition in the summer are subject to the same out-of-state travel limits that apply to school teams during the school season under Regulation II, Section 6, except for camps that are conducted within Michigan.

a) In addition, schools should be alerted to prohibitions against events which are called or purport to be all star events or national high school championships. This prohibition applies to 7 on 7 football.

2. During the summer prior to August 1, except as limited during the summer dead period, football coaches may participate at bona fide summer football skills camps where more than seven students from their school district in grades 7 through 12 are participating; **school transportation may not be used**.

- a) Bona fide football camps are those sponsored by institutions or business enterprises including colleges, individual schools or intermediate school districts, community school programs, etc.
- b) The camps must be open to students from any school district, and are subject to player equipment limitations of shoes and helmets. Sleds and dummies may be used at these camps.
- c) Camps limited to students entering grades 9-12 must be promoted and advertised in public media to be open to students from more than one high school.
- d) Camps sponsored by a high school and limited to students entering grades 9-12 may not extend more than 10 days total.

3. **Schools should alert all players: At no time during the summer or school year outside of the defined football season may MHSAA member student-athletes participate in a camp, clinic, practice, tryout or combine where more than football helmets and football shoes are worn (in-state or out-of-state).**

4. Preseason "Down Time" – Beginning August 1 for all fall sports no open gyms, camps or clinics which involve that sport shall occur at the school or be sponsored elsewhere by the school; and no competition, intersquad or intrasquad between groups that resemble school teams (more than 3 or 4 students of grades 7-12 of the district) may occur at any location with any of that school district's personnel present. The preseason downtime allows voluntary conditioning and has a 4-player limitation (prior to Aug. 1, 7 players).



SUMMER REGULATIONS - QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Regarding Regulation II, Section 11(H)

1. Q When does “summer” vacation begin for a school?
A The Monday after Memorial Day. The summer dead period may not occur when teams are finishing spring academic seasons.
2. Q May the coach of a school football team involve 20 of his players voluntarily in a practice session he conducts in July?
A No. The limit is 7 players, except at a bona fide skills camp or 7 on 7 competition, where there is no limit to the number of players but involves other limitations.
3. Q May a football coach attend and work at a football skills camp in the summer where a dozen members of that coach’s team are enrolled?
A Yes, prior to August 1, but not during the summer dead period.
4. Q May a school sponsor a bona fide football skills camp?
A Yes, it must be open to students from any district; and participants are subject to the equipment limitations of footballs, helmets and football shoes. It may last no longer than 10 days.
5. Q May a football coach be actively involved in coaching in a summer 7-on-7 passing league conducted by a college, community or school?
A Yes, prior to August 1, but not during the summer dead period, coaches may actively coach students in such competition subject to equipment limitations and a maximum of 7 days.
6. Q May a football coach conduct conditioning programs for players in grades 7-12 during the summer?
A Yes, but not during the summer dead period, “Conditioning programs” are permitted out of season if they are voluntary and do not involve equipment that is specific to football conducted on an interscholastic basis. Examples of prohibited equipment include, but are not limited to footballs, dummies and equipment. Generic equipment such as cones, weights, jump ropes, and other fitness apparatuses are permitted.
7. Q May a football team use school transportation to assemble at a site other than the regular location of practice?
A Yes, the use of school transportation is allowed for such purposes, but only one day before the first official day of practice. School transportation may not be used for camps, 7 on 7 competition or other summer activities.
8. Q May a MHSAA member school athlete participate in a full contact camp, clinic, practice, tryout or combine where attendees are wearing either full equipment or helmets, shoulder pads and football shoes?
A **NO.** Michigan athletes may not participate in any out of season activity while wearing more equipment than football helmets and football shoes in-state or out-of-state.

FOOTBALL HELMET INSPECTION

To assist the person responsible for repair and maintenance of helmets, NOCSAE has developed a number of guidelines to observe when inspecting helmets. There may be other things you want to check as this list is not intended to cover every observation which may be made. NOCSAE recommends that a periodic inspection of all helmets be made and that they be periodically retested under the NOCSAE recertification program.

SUGGESTED INSPECTION CHECK LIST

1. Check helmet fit for agreement with manufacturer's instructions and procedures.
2. Examine shell for cracks particularly noting any cracks around holes (where most cracks start) and replace any that have cracked. **DO NOT USE A HELMET WITH A CRACKED SHELL.**
3. Examine all mounting rivets, screws, Velcro and snaps for breakage, distortion and looseness. **Repair as necessary.**
4. Replace face guards if bare metal is showing, there is a broken weld or if guard is grossly misshapen. NOTE: Face protectors must meet NOCSAE test standards at the time of manufacture.
5. Examine for helmet completeness, and replace any parts that have become damaged, such as sweatbands, nose snubbers and chinstraps.
6. Replace jaw pads when damaged. Check for proper installation and fit.
7. Examine 4-point chinstrap for proper adjustment, and inspect to see if it is broken or stretched out of shape; also inspect hardware to see if it needs replacement.
8. Read instructions provided by manufacturer regarding care and maintenance procedures. Always follow these instructions:

CAUTION: Only paints, waxes, decals or cleaning agents approved by the manufacturer are to be used on any helmet. It is possible to get a severe or delayed reaction by using unauthorized materials, which could permanently damage the helmet shell and affect its risk minimization performance.

PLAYERS: Inspect your particular helmet prior to each usage as follows:

SUSPENSION STYLE

Check hardware, i.e., screws or rivets that may be loose/missing.

Check webbing for tears in threads, stretching, or pulling away at rivet locations.

If crown webbing is adjustable, check that crown rope is properly adjusted and is tied tightly using a square knot.

Check interior padding for proper placement and condition.

PADDED STYLE

Foam/Air/Liquid

Check foam padding for proper placement and any deterioration.

Check for cracks in vinyl/rubber covering of air, foam, liquid padded helmets.

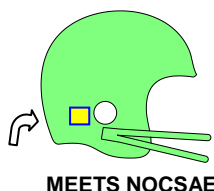
Check that protective system or foam padding has not been altered or removed.

Check for proper amount of inflation in air padded helmets. Follow manufacturer's recommended practice for adjusting air pressure at the valves.

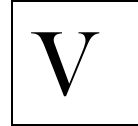
Check all rivets, screws, Velcro and snaps to assure they are properly fastened and holding protective parts.

**If any of the above inspections indicate a need for repair and/or replacement,
notify your coach. THIS IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY.**

NEVER WEAR A



DAMAGED HELMET



2012 FOOTBALL POINTS OF EMPHASIS

CONCUSSIONS, CONTACT TO AND WITH THE HELMET, HELMET TECHNOLOGY AND PROPER HELMET FITTING

Once again, the NFHS Football Rules Committee has chosen to emphasize the head and helmet as a point of emphasis for the 2012 season. Concerns continue about 1) concussion and the risks of initiating contact with and to the helmet; 2) contact initiated above the shoulders, particularly contact to the helmet, both by the person receiving the contact, and the person delivering the contact; and 3) proper helmet fitting. Game officials, coaches, administrators and players involved in the game must continue to be diligent as it relates to all of these aspects.

Concussions

Concussions continue to be a focus of attention in football at all levels of competition. The NFHS has been at the forefront of national sports organizations in emphasizing the importance of concussion education, recognition and proper management.

Discussion of proper concussion management at all levels of play in all sports has led to the adoption of rules changes and concussion-specific policies by multiple athletic organizations, state associations and school districts. Coaches and game officials need to become familiar with the signs and symptoms of a concussed athlete so that appropriate steps can be taken to safeguard the health and safety of participants.

Athletes must know that they should never try to “tough out” a suspected concussion. Teammates, parents and coaches should never encourage an athlete to “play through” the symptoms of a concussion. In addition, there should never be an attribution of bravery associated with athletes who play despite having concussion signs or symptoms. The risks of such behavior must be emphasized to all members of the team, as well as all coaches and parents. If an athlete returns to activity before being fully healed from an initial concussion, the athlete is at an increased risk for a repeat concussion. A repeat concussion that occurs before the brain has a chance to recover from the first can slow recovery or increase the chance for long-term problems. In rare cases, a repeat concussion can result in severe swelling and bleeding in the brain that can be fatal. Governing bodies at all levels of play continue to review and revise playing rules and encourage practices that decrease the risk of concussion. Among the most concerning data from the past several high school football seasons is that concussions continue to account for a high percentage of the injuries reported and that more than half of all concussions were a direct result of helmet-to-helmet contact! All coaches should undergo education and utilize available professional development tools regarding the signs and symptoms of concussion and the proper management of athletes with a suspected concussion. The NFHS offers the free course “Concussion in Sports: What You Need to Know” that is available at www.nfhslearn.com. The free course is a brief and user-friendly resource not just for coaches, but also for students, parents and other interested persons. Many states have developed their own education programs. It is incumbent upon coaches to lead by example in recognizing the seriousness of all suspected concussions.

Contact to and with the Helmet

Over the years, the NFHS Football Rules Committee has repeatedly emphasized the need to keep the HEAD OUT OF FOOTBALL because of the potential for catastrophic head and neck injuries. The committee – in its publications for review by coaches and game officials – has specifically targeted some form of helmet review or illegal helmet contact emphasis 24 times since 1980. In the past few years, all levels of football have increased the

focus on decreasing the risk of concussion, and it is widely conceded that one of the biggest steps in this effort is to eliminate direct helmet-to-helmet contact and any other contact both with and to the helmet.

Any initiation of contact with the helmet is illegal; therefore, there must be a focus on enforcing the existing rules. These rules include fouls such as butt blocking, face tackling and spearing (all of which are illegal helmet contact fouls) as well as other acts prohibited by the provisions regarding unnecessary roughness. These types of contact, such as blows to the head by the defender, initiating contact to the head, and helmet-to-helmet contact are all unnecessary to the playing of the game. When in doubt, contact to or with the helmet should be ruled a foul by game officials.

Helmet Technology and Proper Helmet Fitting

The heightened concern about concussions and the variety of football helmets available have led participants and coaches to seek a helmet that they believe will best protect a player from concussion. While many new football helmets incorporate innovative materials and designs, no existing football helmet is “concussion proof.” Therefore, it is incumbent upon athletic administrators, coaches, game officials, parents and participants to understand the limitations of all protective equipment, including the helmet. Everyone must realize that a combination of best practices, including but not limited to, repeated instruction on proper tackling and blocking techniques, proper helmet fitting and equipment tracking/recertification procedures, and proper and consistent officiating, are the keys to limiting injury risk and must be emphasized within each program.

Proper helmet fit has been a concern in recent years as anecdotal and documented reports of players having helmets completely dislodged during games continue to mount. To emphasize this point, the NFHS Football Rules Committee has passed a rule for the 2012 season that will require the athlete to leave the game for a single play if the helmet comes off during live ball action, unless the removal is due to a foul by the defense. If no foul is called, then the player must be removed. It is imperative that the athletes take an active role in the proper fitting, wear and use of the helmet and realize the “comfort” shortcuts are not permitted.

Every football helmet manufacturer provides various helmet-fitting pamphlets with each helmet sold, detailing how to properly fit the helmet. If the helmet-fitting pamphlets or other football helmet-related instructions are missing, please contact the respective football helmet manufacturer.

HEAT ACCLIMATIZATION AND PREVENTING HEAT ILLNESS

Exertional Heatstroke (EHS) is the leading cause of preventable death in high school athletics. Athletes participating in high-intensity, long-duration or repeated same-day practices during the summer months or other hot-weather days pose the greatest risk. Football has received the most attention because of the number and severity of exertional heat illnesses. Notably, the National Center for Catastrophic Sports Injury Research reports that 35 high school football players died of EHS between 1995 and 2010. EHS also results in thousands of emergency room visits and hospitalizations throughout the nation each year.

In the spring of 2012, the NFHS Sports Medicine Advisory Committee (SMAC) will release a new position statement “Heat Acclimatization and Heat Illness Prevention.” The position statement is intended to provide an outline of “Fundamentals” and may be used as a guiding document by member state associations. Also, the NFHS will release a 20-minute free online course “A Guide to Heat Acclimatization and Heat Illness Prevention” at www.nfhslearn.com, regarding this life-threatening topic. Further and more detailed information will be found within the NFHS online course, as well as the 4th Edition of the NFHS Sports Medicine Handbook, the NFHS SMAC position statement “Recommendations for Hydration to Minimize the Risk for Dehydration and Heat Illness” and other resources.

The new position statement and online course are intended to reduce the risk and incidence of EHS and the resulting deaths and injuries. The NFHS recognizes that various states and regions of the country have unique climates and an assortment of resources, and that there is no “one-size-fits-all” optimal acclimatization plan. However, the NFHS and the NFHS SMAC strongly encourage member state associations to incorporate all of the “Fundamental Musts” into any heat acclimatization plan to improve athlete safety. In addition, the online “A Guide to Heat Acclimatization and Heat Illness Prevention” should be required viewing for all coaches.

Heat Acclimatization and Heat Illness Prevention Keys for Coaches

1. Recognize that Exertional Heatstroke (EHS) is the leading preventable cause of death among high school athletes.

2. Know the importance of a formal pre-season heat acclimatization plan.
3. Know the importance of having and implementing a specific hydration plan, keeping your athletes well hydrated, and providing ample opportunities for, and encouraging, regular fluid replacement.
4. Know the importance of appropriately modifying activities in relation to the environmental heat stress and contributing individual risk factors (e.g., illness, obesity) to keep your athletes safe and performing well.
5. Know the importance for all staff to closely monitor all athletes during practice and training in the heat, and recognize the signs and symptoms of developing heat illnesses.
6. Know the importance of, and resources for, establishing an emergency action plan, practicing the aspects of that plan, and promptly implementing it in case of suspected EHS or other medical emergency.

Fundamentals of a Heat Acclimatization Plan

1. Physical exertion and training activities should begin slowly and continue progressively. An athlete cannot be “conditioned” in a period of only two to three weeks.
2. Keep each athlete’s individual level of conditioning and medical status in mind and adjust activity accordingly. These factors directly affect heat illness risk.
3. Adjust intensity (lower) and rest breaks (increase frequency/duration), and consider reducing uniform and protective equipment, while being sure to monitor all players more closely as conditions are increasingly warm/humid, especially if there is a change in weather from the previous few days.
4. Athletes must begin practices and training activities adequately hydrated.
5. Recognize early signs of distress and developing exertional heat illness, and promptly adjust activity and treat accordingly. First aid should not be delayed!
6. Recognize more serious signs of exertional heat-related distress (clumsiness, stumbling, collapse, obvious behavioral changes and/or other central nervous system problems), immediately stop activity and promptly seek medical attention by activating the Emergency Medical System. On-site rapid cooling should begin immediately.
7. An Emergency Action Plan with clearly defined written and practiced protocols should be developed and in place ahead of time.

HURDLING

In 2012, the committee had requests to change the hurdling rule and eliminate it as a foul. By definition: *“Hurdling is an attempt by a player to jump (hurdle) with one or both feet or knees foremost over an opponent who is contacting the ground with no part of his body except one or both feet.”* This is an Illegal Personal Contact Foul (NFHS Football Rule 9-4-3d) and carries a 15-yard penalty. Recently, national and local media have identified some of these plays at the collegiate and professional levels as “spectacular feats” and glorified the individual’s athletic ability instead of pointing out the heightened potential for harm. Little regard has been given to the fact that attempting to “hurdle” a defender increases the risk of injury to both the hurdler and tackler! The NFHS SMAC requested that this rule not be changed and backed up its request by showing several incidences where players were severely injured while attempting this act! The NFHS Football Rules Committee concurred with the SMAC and did not change the hurdling rule. In addition, to focus on the dangers associated with hurdling, it has been included as a Point of Emphasis for the 2012 season. The emphasis on this illegal act supports the committee’s ongoing attempt to minimize the risk of injuries in high school football. Coaches must teach their players of the inherent dangers associated with this illegal act, and game officials must call it when observed.

ILLEGAL BLOCKING BELOW THE WAIST

In high school football, there are very specific rules regarding the time and circumstances when blocking below the waist is legal. There continues to be problems with game officials not enforcing these restrictions on who can block, who can be blocked and where/when these blocks can occur. In order for a block below the waist to be legal, the following criteria must be met:

1. Both players must be lined up in the free-blocking zone at the snap and on the line of scrimmage. The free-blocking zone is defined as 3 yards on either side of the line of scrimmage and 4 yards either side of the ball.
2. The contact/block must occur in the free-blocking zone.
3. The ball must still be in the free-blocking zone.

The NFHS Football Rules Committee wants to emphasize several examples where it is important to enforce this rule. When a team is lined up in shotgun formation, the restrictions on blocking below the waist begin the moment that the ball leaves the free-blocking zone. Because a shotgun quarterback is usually positioned more than 3 yards behind the line at the snap, when the ball is snapped the ball very quickly leaves the zone and therefore, the only legal blocks below the waist have to be initiated simultaneously with the snap.

Another common example of an illegal block below the waist is when running backs, who line up in the backfield, are “cut” by defenders on sweeps or on roll-out passes. This is clearly a violation of the blocking- below-the-waist rule because it occurs by a player who was not originally on the line of scrimmage and occurs outside the free-blocking zone.

Remember, players on the line of scrimmage and in the free-blocking zone at the time of the snap can legally block below the waist, but only if the free-blocking zone still exists because the ball has not left the zone. The rule applies equally to the offense and the defense.

ILLEGAL SHIFTS INVOLVING THE QUARTERBACK

As today’s offensive formations continue to become more complex, it must be stressed to all coaches and game officials the need to eliminate illegal shifts involving the quarterback. Whenever any player on the offensive team moves to a new position after the ready-for-play signal and before the snap, it is a shift (NFHS Football Rule 2-39). Coaches and game officials must recognize that certain movements by quarterbacks must also be penalized as illegal shifts.

There are several examples of movements by the quarterback that would be considered an illegal shift, such as when all offensive players immediately get into their stance and then the quarterback receives the snap as soon as he/she gets their hands under center. This is illegal because the quarterback needs to be set for one second prior to the snap after the linemen going into stance as this is, in fact, a shift. An illegal-shift foul also occurs when the quarterback first sends a player in motion and after the player is in motion, the quarterback then goes under center to receive the snap.

When all other offensive players are set, movements by the quarterback, other than slightly moving a foot to start another player in motion, must be followed by a pause of one second by everyone on the offense to be considered a legal shift. If the offense is allowed to execute illegal shifts or other movements, teams will gain an advantage not intended by the rules and will disrupt the desired balance between offense and defense.

IMPROPER UNIFORMS

These issues can be grouped into two general categories. Not properly wearing mandatory player equipment and wearing illegal equipment/adornments.

Not Properly Wearing Mandatory Player Equipment:

Pants not covering the knee – Over the years, the NFHS Football Rules Committee has repeatedly emphasized that player equipment must be worn for the protection of the athletes. One piece of player equipment that continues to be inconsistently enforced is the football pants and the required protection of the knee. The committee is encouraging a renewed focus by both coaches and game officials to make sure that pants are worn properly to completely cover the knee. Coaches need to make sure that equipment handed out to players is properly fitted and continues to properly fit throughout the season. Game officials need to recognize when mandatory equipment is not being worn properly and most importantly, game officials must penalize these acts consistently throughout the game, regardless of the situation and regardless of anyone’s feelings about the rule as compared to other levels of football.

Wearing Illegal Equipment/Adornments:

1. Uniform Adornments – Common violations or issues include:

A. Wearing a tinted eye shield – For purpose of injury prevention and recognition, eye shields attached to the helmets must be clear without the presence of any tint and constructed of a molded rigid material.

- B. Wearing towels that exceed the allowed specifications – One, white, unmarked moisture-absorbing towel can be worn. Towel width is a minimum of 4 inches and maximum of 18 inches, while the length is a minimum of 12 inches and a maximum of 36 inches.
- C. Wearing sweatbands at an improper location – Moisture-absorbing sweatbands of any color are allowed to be worn as long as they are worn on the wrist, beginning at the base of the thumb and extending no more than 3 inches toward the elbow.
- D. Wearing bicep bands, neck bands and leg bands – Any moisture-absorbing or other band worn on any other area of the body beside the wrist, other than for medical reasons, is considered an illegal uniform adornment.
- E. Uncovered shoulder, rib and back protectors – These protectors are to be fully covered by the jersey in order to be legal.
- F. Altered knee and ankle braces – As long as knee and ankle braces are unaltered and worn as intended by the manufacturer's original design, no additional padding is required. If any alterations are done from the manufacturer's design and production, or the brace is worn in a manner other than allowed by rule, the brace is illegal.
- G. Wearing jewelry – Any jewelry other than religious and medical alert medals is considered illegal. Religious medals must be taped and worn under the uniform and medical-alert medals must be taped and may be visible.
- H. Illegal pads and padding – Hard and unyielding items (guards, casts, braces, etc.) on the hand, wrist, forearm, elbow or upper arm are illegal unless padded with a closed-cell, slow-recovery foam padding no less than ½-inch thick.
- I. Helmets not secured properly – Helmets must be secured by a properly fastened chinstrap with at least four attachment points.

Coaches and game officials need to be cognizant of the adornments worn by the players, and game officials need to consistently enforce the rules regarding illegal equipment and adornments to prevent further problems from developing with player safety and sportsmanship.



2012 FOOTBALL RULES CHANGES

1-2-3h, Restrictions have been removed for corporate advertising and markings on the field of play.

1-2-3l (NEW)

1-5-2b Football gloves must meet the NOCSAE test standard starting in 2013.

1-5-3c(8) Play cards must be worn on the wrist.

(NEW)

2-3-7 Blocking-below-the-waist rules revised.

2-4-1 Definition of a catch revised.

3-5-10d Player required to be removed if helmet comes off during the down.

9-3-8 Restrictions added to blocking on free kicks.

(NEW)

9-4-3h Illegal personal contact penalty has been revised.

9-4-3k Horse-collar rule has been modified.

2012 EDITORIAL CHANGES

1-1-4; 1-1-8; 1-2-1; 1-2-3e NOTE 2; 1-2-4; 1-3-1c, g; 1-5-1b, c (NEW); 1-5-2b; 1-6-2; Table 1-7 (5); 2-5-3; 2-15-1; 2-16-2f; 2-24-3; 2-24-4; 2-32-15; 2-41-1; 2-44; 3-2-2; 3-2-3b; 3-4-3b; 3-5-2b; 3-5-5b; 3-5-10b, c; 4-2-1; 4-2-2d(2); 4-2-2e(3); 4-2-2j; 8-2-2, 3; 8-3-6b; 9-3-8 PENALTY; 9-4-4 PENALTY; 9-5-2d; Football Fundamentals IX-6; Penalty Summary.

2012 POINTS OF EMPHASIS

1. Concussions, Contact to and with the Helmet, Helmet Technology and Proper Helmet Fitting
2. Heat Acclimatization and Preventing Heat Illness
3. Hurdling
4. Illegal Blocking Below the Waist
5. Illegal Shifts Involving the Quarterback
6. Improper Uniforms

REDUCING BRAIN AND SPINAL INJURIES IN FOOTBALL AND OTHER ATHLETIC ACTIVITIES



FREDERICK O. MUELLER, Ph.D.
ROBERT C. CANTU, M.D.

Brain and spinal injuries in football have been dramatically reduced since the rules were changed in 1976 to prohibit butt blocking and face tackling, and any other technique in which the helmet and facemask purposely received the brunt of the initial impact. There are still a small number of football players (and fewer in other sports) that become paralyzed, but the lesson to keep the head and face out of blocking and tackling remains.

Generally, about 3 – 5% of the injuries experienced by participants in athletics are concussions, e.g., temporary dizziness, confusion, nausea, headaches, and perhaps unconsciousness. Concussions are given grades from Grade 1 (a hit that dazes for a few minutes) to Grade 3 (unconscious). No concussion should be dismissed as minor until proven so by medical personnel. The task is to be sure that the athlete no longer has any post concussion symptoms at rest and exertion before returning to competition. What is now called “the second impact syndrome” with its high rate of morbidity if not mortality is the result of returning to play too soon.

Several suggestions for reducing brain and spinal injuries follow:

1. Preseason physical exams for all participants. Identify during the physical exam those athletes with a history of previous brain or spinal injuries. If the physician has any questions about the athlete’s readiness to participate, the athlete should not be allowed to play.
2. A physician should be present at all games and practices. If it is not possible for a physician to be present at all games and practice sessions, emergency measures must be provided. The total staff should be organized in that each person will know what to do in case of a brain or spinal injury in game or practice. Have a plan ready and have your staff prepared to implement that plan. Prevention of further injury is the main objective.
3. Athletes must be given proper conditioning exercises which will strengthen their neck muscles in order for them to be able to hold their head firmly erect when making contact. Strong neck muscles may help prevent neck injuries.
4. Coaches should drill the athletes in the proper execution of the fundamentals of the football skills, particularly blocking and tackling. **KEEP THE HEAD OUT OF FOOTBALL.**
5. Coaches and officials should discourage the players from using their heads as battering rams. The rules prohibiting spearing should be enforced in practice and games. The players should be taught to respect the helmet as a protective device and that the helmet should not be used as a weapon.
6. All coaches, physicians and trainers should take special care to see that the players’ equipment is properly fitted, particularly the helmet.
7. Strict enforcement of the rules of the game by both coaches and officials will help reduce serious injuries.
8. When a player has experienced or shown signs of brain trauma (loss of consciousness, visual disturbances, headache, inability to walk correctly, obvious disorientation, memory loss) he/she should receive immediate medical attention and should not be allowed to return to practice or game without permission from the proper medical authorities. Coaches should encourage players to let them know if they have any of the above mentioned symptoms (that can’t be seen by others, such as headaches) and why it is important.
9. Both athletes and their parents should be warned of the risks of injuries.
10. Coaches should not be hired if they do not have the training and experience needed to teach the skills of the sport and to properly train and develop the athletes for competition.



Following is a list of Post Concussion Signs/Symptoms:

- Depression
- Numbness/tingling
- Dizziness
- Poor Balance
- Drowsiness
- Poor Concentration
- Excess Sleep
- Ringing in the ears
- Fatigue
- Sadness
- Feel "in fog"
- Sensitive to Light
- Headache
- Sensitivity to Noise
- Irritability
- Trouble falling asleep
- Memory Problems
- Vomiting
- Nausea
- Nervousness

ANNUAL SURVEY OF CATASTROPHIC FOOTBALL INJURIES
1931- 2010

National Center for Catastrophic Sport Injury Research

VIII

<http://www.unc.edu/depts/nccsi/>