

Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference

Officials Concussion Protocol

To keep the role of the official relative to concussion in proper perspective, it is helpful to understand the role of the COACHES, which is clearly defined in the new law, (Public Act 1062). The law places the primary responsibility on COACHES for the health and safety of their athletes and mandates training in the recognition of the signs and symptoms of a possible concussion. The new law is specific to COACHES and there are no requirements in the law that pertains to officials.

In part, Public Act 1062 – An Act Concerning Student Athletes And Concussions...

- Mandates that all coaches complete a course in the management of concussions prior to coaching that includes training in the recognition of signs and symptoms of a concussion or head injury;
- Places the primary responsibility for the athlete's health and safety, including the recognition of signs and symptoms of a possible concussion on the coach;
- Requires that a coach must immediately remove a student athlete from participating in a game or practice who is observed to exhibit signs, symptoms or behaviors consistent with a concussion, following an observed or suspected blow to the head or body, or if the athlete is diagnosed with a concussion;
- Emphasizes that coaches abide by the return to play procedure and protocol required by the law, which includes written medical clearance by a licensed health care professional*, followed by a gradual return to play procedure that should prohibit any student confirmed to have signs and symptoms of a concussion to return to play on the same day as the injury. *(According to CT state law, a licensed health care professional is a physician, physician's assistant, advanced practice registered nurse, and an athletic trainer trained in the evaluation and management of concussions)
- States that any coach found in violation of the law may have his/her coaching certificate revoked.

The CIAC Board of Control position is that the following information and protocol presented for Connecticut officials is consistent with the intent of the NFHS concussion rule and guidelines and in compliance with the state law that all coaches must follow.

Role Of Connecticut Officials

In light of the law in Connecticut and in keeping with the intent of the NFHS rule, the primary role of the official is to assist coaches, trainers, and health care professionals in identifying athletes that need to be checked for a possible head injury, and then defer to the judgment of these trained individuals. The NFHS "concussion rule" does not create a duty that officials are expected to perform a medical diagnosis. Officials are simply being asked to use their best judgment in observing and being more cognizant of athletes that may be

displaying signs, symptoms and behaviors, consistent with a concussion, such as loss of consciousness, headache, dizziness, confusion or balance problems, and stop play to provide the opportunity for the

athlete to be properly checked by the coach, trainer, or other health care professional, trained in the evaluation and management of concussions.

The game official is NOT responsible for the evaluation or management of the athlete after he or she is checked by the coach, trainer, or other appropriate health care professionals or goes to the sideline. The coach, trainer, and other health care professionals assume full responsibility for the health and safety of the athlete. To this end, if an appropriate healthcare professional on the sideline determines that the athlete HAS NOT suffered a concussion and has no signs and symptoms of a concussion, the athlete may go back in the game. If there is no appropriate health-care professional available to further evaluate an athlete exhibiting definite signs and symptoms of a concussion, the law states that the athlete SHOULD NOT be allowed, by the COACH, to return to play. According to NFHS guidelines, the official does not need written permission for an athlete to go back in the game, nor does the official need to verify the credentials of the appropriate health-care professional. If the athlete returns to play, the officials are to assume an appropriate health care professional approved the return. Ensuring compliance with the NFHS suggested concussion guidelines is a health and safety issue and should be the responsibility of the head coach and school administration, NOT the game official.

Suggested Protocol For Connecticut Officials

- If an official observes a player exhibiting any signs or symptoms of a possible concussion, he/she shall provide the opportunity for the coach, trainer, or other appropriate health care professionals to properly check the athlete and then defer to their judgment.
- The official should stop play and either beckons the coach onto the field or escort the player to the coach, depending on the circumstance. State that “the player should be checked out, and if necessary, provide other information you deem appropriate”. Do not say that the athlete has a concussion. At this point the official’s job is done.
- If it is determined the athlete is not injured or the injury is NOT related to a concussion the athlete may return to the game in accordance with NFHS rules.
- If an athlete is returned to the game and the official again observes signs and symptoms of a possible concussion, the protocol should be repeated.

The protocol for handling these situations may vary depending on the circumstances. This is just one sound way to ensure that the athlete gets checked out properly by the coach, trainer, or other appropriate health care professionals, but may not fit all situations. CIAC will defer to the expertise of officials to handle the situation as you deem appropriate.

NFHS Concussion Rule – “Any athlete who exhibits signs, symptoms, or behaviors consistent with a concussion (such as loss of consciousness, headache, dizziness, confusion, or balance problems) shall be immediately removed from the contest and shall not return to play until cleared by an appropriate healthcare professional”.