

Reducing Head and Neck Injuries in Football

(UIL RECOMMENDATIONS)

Head and neck injuries in football have been dramatically reduced since the late 1960's. Several suggestions for continued reduction follow:

1. Preseason physical exams for all participants. Identify during the physical exam those athletes with a history of previous head or neck 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. 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 head or neck 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 necks so that participants will 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 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 in 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 player's 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 head trauma (loss of consciousness, visual disturbances, headache, inability to walk correctly, obvious disorientation, memory loss) he should receive immediate medical attention and should not be allowed to return to practice or game without permission from the proper medical authorities.

SOURCE: Frederick O. Mueller, Ph.D.

Keeping the Head Out of Football

Rules changes that eliminated the head as the initial contact point in blocking and tackling have significantly reduced head and neck injuries in the sport.

Coaches can do their part to continue that trend by teaching correct techniques and emphasizing proper fundamentals at all times. That way, players can avoid catastrophic injury and coaches can avoid lawsuits.

Keep the head out of football.

Coaches Checklist

1. Keep the head up.
2. Discuss risk of injury.
3. Keep the head out of contact.
4. Explain how serious injuries can occur.
5. Involve parents in early season meeting.
6. Have a set plan for coaching safety.
7. Clearly explain and demonstrate safe techniques.
8. Provide best medical care possible.
9. Monitor blocking and tackling techniques every day.
10. Repeat drills which stress proper and safe techniques.
11. Admonish and/or discipline users of unsafe techniques.
12. Receive clearance by doctor for athlete to play following head trauma.
13. Stress safety every day.
14. Don't glorify head hunters.
15. Support officials who penalize for illegal helmet contact.
16. Don't praise or condone illegal helmet contact.
17. Provide conditioning to strengthen neck muscles.
18. Entire staff must be "tuned in" to safety program.
19. Check helmet condition regularly.
20. Improper technique causes spinal cord injuries.
21. Helmet must fit properly.
22. Be prepared for a catastrophic injury.
23. The game doesn't need abusive contact.
24. Player safety is your responsibility.
25. It's a game - not a job - for the players.