

To: MSHSL Board of Directors/ Member Schools/Coaches Associations/Others

From: MSHSL Office

Re: CONCUSSION TALKING POINTS

Date: December 21, 2015

With the upcoming release of the movie, ***Concussion***, the debate around head injuries and player safety in high school athletics has reemerged and will likely produce a new cycle of scrutiny on high school athletics. The following information is intended to provide “talking points” about this issue if you receive inquiries about what has been done in Minnesota to address concussions in League-sponsored sports.

This information is not intended to be an “Us vs. Them” issue. Rather, this film may well provide an opportunity to reclaim the narrative on the safety of high school sports. Obviously, there is a degree of risk in all athletic activities but the MSHSL, other state high school associations, and the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) have collectively and collaboratively been proactive in developing rule changes, education and awareness efforts, and research about this issue.

Films like ***Concussion*** shine a light on player safety, including head injuries, topics the high school community has discussed and addressed at both the state and national levels for decades.

The end of the fall sport season marks an important opportunity for us to reflect on the work that has already been done in the area of player safety. But while we have made tremendous progress, we recognize that there is more work that needs to be done.

We continue to work with state high school association colleagues, our Minnesota Sports Medicine Committee, expertise at the national level, our member schools, and the NFHS to continue to improve player safety at all levels; to educate student-athletes, parents, and school personnel as partners in this endeavor; and engage our collective constituency in a shared responsibility surrounding the health and safety of athletes in all sports sponsored by each member school.

In short,

- *We recognize there is a degree of risk in all sports, and that's why we continue to lead efforts nationwide to minimize this risk.*
- *There is a tremendous value that participating in high school athletics provides for our students that cannot be replicated at any other level.*
- *Participation in League-sponsored programs sponsored in each Minnesota school community provides opportunities to learn critical lessons in teamwork, perseverance, dedication, humility, accountability, collaboration, communication and leadership.*
- *These skills help our students on their path as citizens, leaders and parents who will make positive impacts in the communities, families and in the world at large.*
- *It's our job to continue to promote and enhance high school athletics so that even more student-athletes have the opportunity to play the games they love, safely.*

In order to effectively communicate the value of high school activities, as well as to address safety issues for all activities, it's important for the public at large to understand that the MSHSL

- worked collaboratively with legislators in 2010-2011 to develop legislation that defined and required concussion education for coaches, athletes and parents, and for participants in youth sports programs in Minnesota.
- posts the *CONCUSSION MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MSHSL ATHLETES* and for all member schools in the Resource section of the MSHSL web site which includes return to play and return to learn protocol.
- has identified a web site (www.cdc.gov/concussion) as part of the most current *MSHSL ELIGIBILITY STATEMENT* for parents and students to review. Parents and students must affirm that they have reviewed the Concussion Management Recommendations.
- requires a student and the student's parent(s) to annually sign and submit the *ELIGIBILITY STATEMENT* to the school activity director prior to participation in any MSHSL sponsored activity program.
- developed, with support of the Medtronic Foundation, the *Anyone Can Save a Life* (ASCAL) program. This initiative has now been shared with every high school in the nation through a grant from the NFHS Foundation. Reports from colleagues recount the effectiveness of planning for emergencies and life saving efforts.

- provides a specific requirement for every MSHSL coach and fine arts director to review the concussion protocol every three years.
- requires annual on-line rules meetings for each coach and contest official which contains numerous references relative to concussion safety and additional safety information about sport participation.
- works closely with the MSHSL Sports Medicine Committee to ensure that the most current information and protocol is available for school activity directors and parents relative to the health and safety of student athletic and fine arts participants.
- has reviewed conflicting opinions from physicians relative to a ban on football.
 - November 21, 2015 article in the StarTribune , *“Minnesota doctors call for removal of football from public schools.”*, Dr. Steven Miles, University of Minnesota.
 - December 8, 2015 article in the StarTribune, *“Counterpoint: Call to ban football collides with the facts.”* by Uzma Samadani, Rockswold Kaplan Endowed Chair for Traumatic Brain Injury, associate professor of neurosurgery at the University of Minnesota.
 - Dr. Julian Bailes, Chairman of Neurosurgery and neurosurgeon for Northwestern (IL). Dr. Bailes says he knows of no cases of CTE diagnosed from just playing youth football, and that the dangers in youth football are extremely low. Dr. Bailes acknowledged the inherent risks in football are not dissimilar from the risks associated with activities like riding a bike, skiing and swimming. Football is safer than it’s ever been due to equipment changes and rule modifications reviewed annually by the NFHS Football Rules Committee members and the NFHS Sports Medicine Committee.
 - The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) position statement affirms that tackle football should not be eliminated from youth sports. They propose a series of measures to make football safer – including limiting contact practices, rule changes, improved protective equipment among others. *These initiatives have already been enacted by the MSHSL.*
- has incorporated changes that restrict the number of practices, the length of practices and the number of contact days of football practice during the summer waiver period, pre-season practice and the regular season.
- enacted policies in football that restrict the length and number of practices during the pre-season to help athletes better acclimatize to equipment and weather conditions. Similar policies are being considered for other sports affected by weather conditions.

- updated school administrators on research and current developments regarding concussions and concussion safety at all Area Meetings.
- continues to work directly with the Minnesota Football Coaches Association to provide additional education for coaches regarding concussions with an emphasis on the need to teach proper techniques to play the game safely as well as other safety issues.
- has implemented 8 of the 9 recommendations from the NFHS Concussion Summit held in July of 2014 and is currently working on the implementation of the 9th recommendation.
- continues to work closely with registered officials to “recognize and refer” athletes who demonstrate signs of a concussion for review by coaches and medical personnel as identified in the NFHS rules book for each sport.
- referenced each sport rules book that reflects the annual work of NFHS Rules Writing Committees to keep football, and each sport sponsored by the MSHSL, as safe as it can be by officiating the sport as the playing rules identify and with an emphasis on safety related fouls.
- published articles written by League staff, sports medicine physicians, and others in the MSHSL Bulletin about player safety and related topics.

National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS)

The NFHS, a collaboration of 51 state high school associations (including the District of Columbia) has been writing football rules since 1932. There have been numerous rule changes over the years to make the game safer than ever before, and the participation numbers in football have not dropped significantly, especially when declining enrollment and increased emphasis on sports specialization are considered.

Annually, each state high school association sends a representative(s) to the Football Rules Committee meeting at which rules changes are submitted and considered for change. SAFETY is the priority in every discussion before any proposed rule change is contemplated by the full committee.

While not all football safety changes are included below, some of the significant changes from the past 10 years include

- 2005-Present – Comprehensive injury data used as a resource for rules-writing has been collected by Dr. Dawn Comstock through the National High School Sports-Related Injury Surveillance System and is used to reduce risk of future injuries.
- 2008 – The NFHS Sports Medicine Committee advocated that a concussed athlete must be removed from play and not allowed to play on the same day.
- 2009-Present – All NFHS rules publications contain guidelines for management of a student exhibiting signs, symptoms or behavior consistent with a concussion. The player must be removed from play until cleared by an appropriate health care professional **acting within their scope of licensure** (emphasis added for Minnesota. This does not include the parent of a concussed athlete who may also be a licensed physician.)
- 2010 – An on-line concussion course was developed and more than two million people have viewed the information.
- 2010- Present – Guidelines for Management of Concussions have been published in every NFHS rules book.
- 2011-2012 – The NFHS Football Rules Committee adopted “Concussions Related to Proper Use of Helmet” as a point of emphasis for coaches and officials.
- 2014 – The NFHS Concussion Summit Task Force adopted recommendations for reducing the number of full contact in practices.
- 2014 – The NFHSL Football rule book contained a definition and penalty for targeting aimed at preventing players from hitting an opponent, primarily with the player’s helmet – above the shoulders.
- Published an article entitled *Concussions and the Issues of “Return to Learn”* in the NFHS Winter, 2015 *High School Today* magazine highlighting information about the need for the collective family, school, academic and medical team to provide a direction and appropriate standard of care for a concussed athlete.
- 2015 – Planning has already begun for the January 23-24, 2016 Football Rules Committee meeting in Indianapolis, IN with a continued focus on player safety.