

## SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR INTERCOLLEGIATE SPORTS SAFETY

A Statement of the NCAA Committee on Competitive Safeguards

And the Medical Aspects of Sports

2009-10

Participation in intercollegiate athletics involves unavoidable exposure to an inherent risk of injury. However, student-athletes rightfully assume that those who sponsor intercollegiate athletics have taken reasonable precautions to minimize the risks of injury from athletics participation. In an effort to do so, the NCAA collects injury data in intercollegiate sports. When appropriate, the NCAA Committee on Competitive Safeguards and Medical Aspects of Sports makes recommendations to modify safety guidelines, equipment standards, or a sport's rules of play.

It is important to recognize that rule books, safety guidelines, and equipment standards, while helpful means of promoting safe athletics participation, are themselves insufficient to accomplish this goal. To effectively minimize the risks of injury from athletics participation, everyone involved must understand and respect the intent and objectives of applicable rules, guidelines, and standards.

The institution, through its athletics director, is responsible for establishing a

safe environment for its student-athletes to participate in its intercollegiate athletics program.

Coaches should appropriately warn student-athletes about the sport's inherent risks of injury and instruct them how to minimize risks while participating in games, practices, and training.

The team physician and athletic health care team should assume responsibility for developing an appropriate injury prevention program and providing quality sports medicine care to injured student-athletes.

Student-athletes should fully understand and comply with the rules and standard of play that govern their sports as well as follow established procedures to minimize their risk of injury.

In summary, all persons participating in, or associated with, an institution's intercollegiate athletics program share responsibility for taking steps to reduce effectively the risk of injury during intercollegiate athletic competition.

The following illustration uses football head/neck injury prevention and covers only one significant safety problem in sport. Other concerns within football and other sports can be similarly approached. It is impossible and should be unnecessary to expect the game officials to examine each helmet of the teams before each game to ensure that every helmet meets NOCSAE safety standards. Respect for the approved safety standard alone should ensure that nothing but NOCSAE helmets are available to be worn. Optimal effectiveness will come only from the athlete's informed compliance with all basic principles of head/neck injury prevention.

1. Serious head and neck injuries, which may lead to death, permanent brain damage, or quadriplegia, occur each year in football. The toll is relatively small,

but persistent (less than one fatality and one non-fatal severe brain and spinal cord injury for every 100,000 players). They cannot be completely prevented due to the tremendous forces occasionally encountered in football collisions, but they can be minimized by manufacturer, and coach and athlete compliance with accepted safety standards.

2. The NOCSAE seal on a helmet indicates that a manufacturer has complied with the best available engineering standards for head protection. By keeping a proper fit, by not modifying its design, and by reporting to the coach or equipment manager any need for its maintenance, the athlete is also complying with the purpose of the NOCSAE standard.
3. The rules against intentional butting, ramming, or spearing the opponent with the helmeted head are to protect the helmeted person more so than the opponent being hit. The athlete who does not comply with these rules is the candidate for catastrophic injury. For example, no helmet can offer protection to the neck, and quadriplegia now occurs more frequently than brain damage. The typical scenario of this injury in football is lowering of the head while making a tackle. The momentum of the body tries to bend the neck after the helmeted head is stopped by the impact, and the cervical spine cannot be “splinted” as well by the neck’s muscles with the head lowered as with the preferred “face up, eyes forward, neck bulled” position. When the force at impact is sufficient, the vertebrae in the neck can dislocate or break, causing damage to the spinal cord, and can thereby produce permanent loss of motor and sensory function below the level of injury.
4. Because of the impact forces in football, even the “face up” position is no guarantee against head or neck injury. Further, the intent to make contact “face up” is not a guarantee that the position can be maintained at the moment of impact. Consequently, the teaching of blocking/tackling techniques which keep the helmeted head from receiving the brunt of the impact is now required by rule and coaching ethics, and coaching techniques which help athletes maintain or regain the “face up” position during the milieu of a play must be respected by the athletes.

Coaches should acquaint their athletes appropriately of risks of injury and the rules employed to minimize significant injury while pursuing the many benefits of sport. The athlete and the athletic program have a mutual need for an informed awareness of the risks being accepted and for sharing the responsibility for controlling those risks.

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My signature below certifies I have read and understand the Statement of the NCAA Committee on Competitive Safeguards and the Medical Aspect of Sports, specifically relating to Shared Responsibility for Sport and Safety.

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Signature of Athlete

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Date

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Print Name

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Sport