

# ***Concussion Rule Revised, Strengthened in High School Football***

INDIANAPOLIS, IN (March 4, 2010) — Effective with the 2010 high school football season, any player who shows signs, symptoms or behaviors associated with a concussion must be removed from the game and shall not return to play until cleared by an appropriate health-care professional.

The concussion rule was one of 12 changes approved by the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) Football Rules Committee at its meeting last month in Indianapolis. The rule changes subsequently were approved by the NFHS Board of Directors.

The previous rule directed officials to remove an athlete from play if “unconscious or apparently unconscious.” The previous rule also allowed for return to play based on written authorization by a medical doctor. Now, officials are charged with removing any player who shows signs, symptoms or behaviors consistent with a concussion, such as loss of consciousness, headache, dizziness, confusion or balance problems, and shall not return to play until cleared by an appropriate health-care professional.

“Given that the vast majority of concussions do not include a loss of consciousness, but that athletes often show obvious evidence of concussion, the NFHS Sports Medicine Advisory Committee (SMAC) strongly believes that officials must continue to be empowered to remove these athletes from play, thus protecting them from further injury,” said Dr. Michael Koester, chair of the SMAC. “Continued participation in any sport following a concussion can lead to worsening concussion symptoms, as well as increased risk for further injury to the brain and even death.

“The safety of the athlete is of paramount concern during any athletic contest. Officials, coaches and administrators are being asked to make all efforts at ensuring that concussed athletes do not continue to participate. Thus, coaches, players and administrators should also be looking for signs of concussion in all athletes and should immediately remove any suspected concussed athlete from play.”

In addition to football, the new concussion language is being placed in all NFHS rules books for the 2010-11 season, as well as the “NFHS Suggested Guidelines for Management of Concussion.”

Among the other changes were four pertaining to equipment, two dealing with player conduct, one concerning penalty options on scoring plays and three others in Rule 3 dealing with periods, time factors and substitution.

“The NFHS Football Rules Committee continues to focus its primary efforts toward maintaining the highest level of player safety,” said Julian Tackett, executive assistant commissioner of the Kentucky High School Athletic Association and chair of the NFHS Football Rules Committee. “This is evidenced by several rule changes related to equipment and concussions that were approved for 2010 following review by the NFHS SMAC. The rules of the game are in very good order and our members felt that no substantial changes were necessary beyond our emphasis on the health and welfare of the high school student-athlete.”

Among the equipment changes was approval of a new football glove/hand pad standard for the 2012 season. Beginning in 2012, gloves, which may be anchored with athletic tape and even though modified, must meet the National Operating Committee on Standards for Athletic Equipment (NOCSAE) test standards at the time of manufacture.

Other equipment changes include removal of restrictions on penalty-marker colored pads or gloves; revisions in the padding rule for guards, casts and braces; and clarification of the illegal player equipment rule.

In Rule 9-4-3k, the committee approved a clarification to the horse-collar rule. The wording in the definition of a horse-collar was changed to address situations when player possession was lost or the ball became dead by rule after the back or side of the jersey collar/shoulder pads were grasped.

“Under the previous rule, if the horse-collar occurred inbounds, but the tackle was completed out of bounds, in the end zone or after a loss of player possession, a horse-collar foul could not be called as the player was no longer a runner,” said Bob Colgate, NFHS assistant director and liaison to both the Football Rules Committee and the SMAC. “The wording was modified to ensure that a horse-collar foul could be called even if the runner no longer had possession of the ball or the ball became dead by rule.”

In Rule 8-2, six existing articles were refined and a new article created regarding fouls on scoring plays that have succeeding spot enforcement. Colgate said the changes now give both teams the same options when a non-player or unsportsmanlike conduct foul is committed during a down in which a touchdown is scored.

In other changes, the point differential rule by state adoption was modified to allow state associations to terminate a game at any point once the point differential is reached. Previously, the end of the first half was the earliest termination of a game by rule. In Rule 3-2-2, coin toss provisions were revised to state that no more than four captains per team can be on the field of play for the coin toss. In Rule 3-7-1, the committee revised the timeframe for replacing players from “immediately” to “within three seconds.”

Finally, the rules committee altered field markings in nine-, eight- and six-player football. All players who participated in the previous down and all substitutes must be momentarily between the 7-yard marks if they play on regulation 80-yard fields.

Points of emphasis adopted by the NFHS Football Rules Committee for the 2010 season include concussion recognition and management, heat illness and hydration, illegal helmet contact, assisting the runner, sportsmanship and public-address announcers, and NFHS Football Officials Manual.