



2013 FOOTBALL POINTS OF EMPHASIS

PROHIBITION ON CONTACT TO AND WITH THE HELMET

In an effort to minimize the risk of catastrophic head and neck injuries, the NFHS Football Rules Committee continues to urge KEEPING THE HEAD OUT OF FOOTBALL. While the wearing of a football helmet can never guarantee the elimination of head and neck injuries, all levels of football have increased their focus on reducing these types of injuries as much as possible. It is recognized that one of the biggest steps in that endeavor is to eliminate direct helmet-to-helmet contact and any other contact both with and to the helmet.

Direct helmet-to-helmet contact and any other contact both with and to the helmet must be eliminated from the sport of football at the interscholastic level! Using the helmet to inflict punishment on the opponent is dangerous and illegal. Coaches and game officials must be diligent in promoting the elimination of contact to and with the helmet, as follows:

- Coaches -- through consistent adherence to proper and legal coaching techniques.
- Game Officials -- through strict enforcement of pertinent playing rules and game administrations.

Coaches must insist that players play “heads-up” football by utilizing proper and safe techniques, - not only during games, but on the practice field as well. Coaches must shoulder the responsibility of consistently reinforcing with their players that using the top or face of the helmet goes against all tenets of the basic techniques of safe and legal blocking and tackling.

The No. 1 responsibility for game officials must be player safety. Any initiation of contact with the helmet is illegal; therefore, it must be penalized consistently and without warning. Player safety is really a matter of attitude, technique, attention and supervision. Football players will perform as they are taught; therefore, there must be a concentrated focus on consistently enforcing the existing rules. And contrary to most other rule enforcements, when in doubt, contact to and with the helmet should be ruled as a foul by game officials. Contact to and with the helmet may be considered a flagrant act and may be penalized by disqualification if a game official considers the foul so severe or extreme that it places an opponent in danger of serious injury.

Consistent education, recognition and penalty enforcement of contact to and with the helmet must be adhered to throughout practice time and contests, regardless of the situation. Whether it is in the first practice, last practice, first quarter of the first game or overtime of the state championship, contact to and with the helmet must be discouraged and taken out of the game by coaches, players and game officials. It is hoped that this concentrated approach will be a positive step toward reinforcing player safety!

RECONDITIONING AND RECERTIFICATION OF FOOTBALL EQUIPMENT

When addressing overall player safety related to the game of football, an essential component is the recertification and reconditioning of equipment. No piece of equipment lasts for a lifetime, but schools can safely extend the life of equipment if they follow proper procedures and guidelines before, during and after the season concludes. It is important that the equipment manager (i.e., athletic director, coach or volunteer) has a system in place to document equipment use by players, as well as recertification and/or reconditioning dates. This information serves as a valuable resource in determining future equipment needs and expenditures while providing a historical record that can be accessed if necessary.

Careful investigation should be made prior to selecting a recertification and/or reconditioning company. Quality companies will be able to guarantee that any work performed on equipment will meet national safety standards and will most likely have some type of warranty replacement program as part of the process. Schools need to protect themselves and the participants - the company the school selects should be able to provide a certificate of product liability insurance that outlines coverage limits. It is recommended that the school perform a complete evaluation of the certificate prior to entering into any agreement.

Recertification and/or reconditioning efforts are not limited to helmets. Shoulder, rib, hip, thigh, knee, tailbone and back pads need to be cleaned, sanitized and repaired each year. The company the school selects should be able to outline the recertification and/or reconditioning process that will be used and whether or not replacement parts are the manufacturer's original or from another source. Other items, such as football field equipment that utilizes padding of any type, should be inspected and repaired as well.

Minimizing risk in a football program should involve a comprehensive review of every aspect from player equipment to on-field equipment. Take the time to select a recertification and/or reconditioning company that has a proven track record with multiple clients. It is appropriate to check references before making a final selection. Recertification and/or reconditioning of equipment is an essential part of any football program. Creating a historical tracking record for equipment, repairing equipment to factory standards and recertifying equipment to meet national standards are expected. The following is some specific football reconditioning and recertification information for football helmets:

Definition of Reconditioning and Recertification

- ❖ **Reconditioning** – The inspection, cleaning, sanitizing and repair/restoration of athletic equipment to the original performance standard.
- ❖ **Recertification** – The reconditioning, testing and proper labeling of athletic equipment that has previously met the NOCSAE standard and recertification standard.

What is the recommendation on how often football helmets should be reconditioned/recertified?

The helmet manufacturers recommend every year and a minimum of every other year to maintain the warranty on their helmets. The National Operating Committee on Standards for Athletic Equipment (NOCSAE) and the National Athletic Equipment Reconditioners Association (NAERA) both recommend every year. All NAERA members are licensed by NOCSAE to recondition and recertify all football helmets manufactured under the NOCSAE logo.

How often are football helmets required to be reconditioned/recertified?

The state of California is the only state that requires helmet reconditioning/recertification. The NOCSAE standards do not specify or require reconditioning or recertification of football helmets on any particular schedule or frequency. A common practice is to inspect all football helmets at the end of the football season, and schedule half of a school's inventory to be reconditioned/recertified annually. Inspection of all football helmets may identify helmets that are in need of reconditioning/recertification after each season. As of the 2012 football season, NAERA members do not recondition/recertify any helmet 10 years of age or older.

Can a football helmet be recertified without being reconditioned?

No. All helmets taken in to a NAERA facility are required to be reconditioned and recertified. A random sample of football helmets is NOCSAE drop-tested before and after the reconditioning process with the data collected on those test helmets.

FREE BLOCKING ZONE ENFORCEMENT – CONSISTENT ENFORCEMENT OF BLOCKING BELOW THE WAIST

Free Blocking Zone

The free blocking zone is defined as a rectangular area extending laterally 4 yards either side of the spot of the snap and 3 yards behind each line of scrimmage. A player is considered to be in the free-blocking zone when any part of his body is in the zone at the snap. The definition of the line of scrimmage for each team is a vertical plane through the point of the ball nearest to the team's goal line.

Blocking Below the Waist is Permitted in the Free-Blocking Zone:

1. All players involved in blocking are on the line of scrimmage and in the zone at the snap.
2. The contact is in the free-blocking zone.
3. The ball has not left the free-blocking zone.

Clipping and Blocking in the Back is Permitted in the Free-Blocking Zone:

1. By offensive linemen who are on the line of scrimmage and in the free-blocking zone at the snap.
2. Against defensive linemen who are on the line of scrimmage and in the free-blocking zone at the snap.
3. The contact is in the free-blocking zone.

4. The ball has not left the free-blocking zone.

The basic guideline is that the free-blocking zone exists while the ball is in the zone and ceases to exist when the ball has left the zone. The exception for a player to block below the waist and/or the exception for an offensive player to clip and/or block is not to continue after the ball has left the zone. With the creation of the “shot-gun” and “pistol” formations, an interpretation of the free-blocking zone rule allows for an offensive lineman to legally initiate contact, immediately at the snap, with a defensive lineman by blocking below the waist, clipping or blocking in the back, even though the ball leaves the free-blocking zone soon after the snap. Any delay in the block would make it illegal, as the free-blocking zone no longer exists.

The Basic Rules to Keep in Mind at the Snap:

1. Defensive players may not clip.
2. Offensive backs may not clip.
3. Offensive linemen not in the zone at the snap may not clip.

Items for Game Officials to Consider:

1. Because a quarterback in the "shotgun" or "pistol" formation is usually positioned more than 3 yards behind the line of scrimmage at the snap, a legal block below the waist, clip or block in the back must be initiated simultaneously with the snap. Once the ball leaves the free-blocking zone, a block below the waist, clip or block in the back is a foul.
2. Offensive linemen set in a 2-point stance in a "shotgun" or "pistol" formation are particularly suspect. Any delay in executing a block below the waist, clip or block in the back after the snap in these formations results in a foul.
3. Be alert to running backs and wide receivers who line up outside the free-blocking zone, being “cut” by defenders on sweeps or roll-out passes. Blocking-below-the-waist rules apply equally to the offense and defense.
4. Up backs should not be allowed to block defenders below the waist when the team is in a scrimmage kick, shot-gun or pistol formation. Only those players on the line of scrimmage and in the free-blocking zone at the time of the snap can block below the waist, and only in the free-blocking zone, and only if the free-blocking zone still exists.