

Officials' Guide to Implementing the Concussion Rule in Illinois

Prevention and management of head injuries (i.e., concussions) has attracted considerable attention in the sports and medical communities over the past decade. On-going research has shown individuals can suffer a concussion without being knocked out, and the incidence of second impact syndrome is growing rapidly. In response to this, the NFHS has adopted a new playing rule for all sports aimed at increasing awareness of possible concussions. The intent of the rule is not to require or expect officials to make any type of diagnosis relative to any type of injury; rather, the intent is to provide a safer playing environment for student-athletes in all sports and to put the onus on schools to determine if/when athletes may return to play.

To assist contest officials with implementation of this rule, the IHSA has developed this guide to clarify the role of officials in addressing this issue. Previously, the IHSA has published its protocols for implementing this rule. This guide is intended to assist officials in understanding their role within those protocols. Officials with additional questions should contact their sport administrator at the IHSA Office. As the year unfolds, those questions will be used to further assist schools and officials in administering this rule and creating a more positive experience for student-athletes.

The following is a list of expectations (do's) for officials:

- **R**eview the rule with head coaches at the pre-game conference. It is not recommended to ask at this time if anyone is present to serve as the school's health care professional.
- **B**e observant during the contest, particularly after 'high impact' -type plays.
- **W**hen sending players out for a possible injury, make sure the head coach is aware of the situation. Officials can say something to the effect of, "Coach, (#23) is apparently injured and he/she should be examined by your school's-designated health care professional."
- **N**ote the number of any player who is removed from a contest for a possible head injury. This will be important when completing your post-game Special Report.
- **A**ny athlete who is knocked unconscious or apparently unconscious will NOT be allowed to return to play that day...regardless of who may attempt to clear the athlete.
- **W**hen a coach wishes to return to play an athlete who has been cleared by the school's designated health care professional, he/she should do so during a normal stoppage of play. In doing so, the coach should inform the official that the player has been cleared. At this point, the official should inquire who gave the approval. This information should also be noted in the post-game Special Report.
- **I**f a coach returns a player to the contest after being cleared, the player shall only be returned in accordance with contest rules for substitution. In other words, officials should not create a special opportunity not allowed for within the playing rules for a sport so that a player can return to play in a contest.
- **I**f an athlete is returned to play without proper notification from the coach, officials should stop the contest, bring the player to the head coach, and ask for clarification of the situation.

- **F**ile a Special Report with the IHSA Office following ANY contest in which an athlete is removed for a possible concussion. In the report, the submitting official should indicate the athlete who was removed (by name and/or number) and whether the player returned to the contest or not. If the player returned, the report should contain the name and/or capacity of the individual whom the coach reported gave approval for the athlete to return to play.

The following is a list of don'ts for officials:

- **M**ake diagnoses during a contest.
- **F**orget to ask a coach who has cleared an athlete to return to play after being removed. The only individuals who can make the decision to return to play are certified athletic trainers and physicians licensed to practice medicine in all its branches in Illinois (this would mean a MD or DO). When you are informed that the person clearing the athlete is not one of the previously mentioned persons, the athlete should not be allowed to return to the game/contest/event.
- **Q**uestion a coach who informs you that the athlete was cleared by an appropriate health care professional. If the coach provides a name, that's fine, but if he/she doesn't, you are not required to get one. Being informed that a physician licensed to practice medicine in all its branches in Illinois (this would mean a MD or DO) or a certified athletic trainer made the call is enough for implementing this rule. Make sure that is noted in your Special Report.

Officials with additional questions about the implementation of this rule should contact their sport-specific administrator at the IHSA Office.