Protecting Players While Protecting the Integrity of the Game in Youth Soccer

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Introduction:

Are the newest US Soccer regulations and protocols to prevent concussions going to protect youth players or simply hurt the game?

• Over 3 million youth soccer players registered to play in the US in 2016
• My objective was to compile the most current concussion research and medical opinions with various coaches opinions to evaluate and improve the newest regulations to create a fun and safe playing environment.

Materials and Methods

• Researched the newest US Soccer protocols and regulations
• Interviewed coaches from the youth level, high school level, collegiate level and professional level to see the impact the newest regulations may make on the game
• Interviewed various high school and collegiate trainers to evaluate how they felt coaches reaction and the new regulations might affect player safety and the game
• Evaluated the most current research and how it supported or didn’t support the new regulations
• Wrote an article evaluating the protocols as well as making suggestions for change that was supported by both coaches and research

New US Soccer Regulations 2015

Players must be released by a medical doctor after head injury during play
Immediate stoppage of play and mandatory substitution for any head injury during a game
Eliminate heading for children ten and under
Limiting the amount of heading in practices for ages 11 and 13 (10 times/practice)

Return to Play Protocol

Conclusions and Implications

To maintain integrity of the game and player safety research and coaches agree the game needs:
• Further education of coaches and parents
• Development of neck and jaw muscles to decrease head acceleration starting at a young age
• Coaching proper techniques in a controlled setting
• Have trainers or other certified medical personnel at more club and youth level games

No research has been conclusive in showing that heading a ball properly at a young age leads to a greater risk for concussion or brain damage, however more research in ways to decrease head acceleration should be conducted as well as a study if there are less concussions after the release of the US Soccer concussion protocols.

Sources

1. An Evidence-Based Discussion of Heading the Ball and Concussions in High School Soccer. Comstock, Currie, et al. 2015.
2. Head injuries in children’s football—results from two prospective cohort studies in four European countries, Faude, Rossett et al. Feb 2017