



NorCal Concussion Initiative and Protocol

Dear Referees,

This week, NorCal Spring season, NPL and State Cup (Round 16, Quarter, Semi and Finals) will start. Per USSF's New Youth Concussion Initiative, NorCal has the following instructions for all it's members. Please note there are other organizations in Northern California i.e., AYSO and Cal-North/CYSA. You must contact other organizations for their initiative as I am sure they will have different guidelines. We will be discussing the three major components of NorCal's initiative:

HEADING OF THE BALL:

- Players of U12 (Rec only), U11, U10, U9 and U8 are prohibited to DELIBERATELY head the ball.
- When a player deliberately heads the ball in a game, an indirect free kick (IDFK) should be awarded to the opposing team from the spot of the offense.
- If the deliberate header occurs within the goal area, the indirect free kick should be taken on the goal area line parallel to the goal line at the point nearest to where the infringement occurred.
- If a player does not deliberately head the ball, then play should continue.
- NorCal HIGHLY recommends that during the team check-in, the referee crew inform team officials and players of enforcing this new rule. Not everyone is aware of this new rule.
- If a goal is scored by a player deliberately heading the ball, the goal should be disallowed and IDFK should be awarded.
- The IDFK is awarded NOT FOR A DANGEROUS PLAY but for the safety of the player.

- THERE SHALL BE NO CARD GIVEN FOR THIS ACTION.
- THERE SHALL BE NO CONSIDERATION FOR PERSISTENT INFRINGEMENT FOR THIS ACTION.
- THE IDFK IS CONSIDERED TO BE A TEAM VIOLATION. THERE IS NO PUNISHMENT FOR THE INDIVIDUAL PLAYER.

I know that many of our “What IF” referees will have “what if” questions. This is a new guideline. It’s new to all of us including FIFA. Rest assured that we will see some changes coming from USSF in the next couple of years as we encounter challenges. For the time being follow the given instructions.

Concussion “Guidance & Direction” for NorCal Games: Dealing with “Head Injuries” and “potential head injuries”.

- Head injuries may be caused when two players challenge for air ball and their heads collide, goalkeeper or any player collision of their head against goal post, player hitting their head against the ground or receiving a blow to the head by an elbow, a kick or during a fight or mass confrontation and on and on.
- When there is “head Injuries” or “potential head injuries”, STOP THE GAME, evaluate the injured player or players, and the Coach must be called onto the field.

What are the signs of concussion?

Headache, Loss of consciousness, Confusion, Double/Fuzzy vision, Dizziness, Balance problems, Nausea, Slow reaction time, Amnesia/Difficulty remembering, Difficulty concentrating, Sensitivity to light and noise, Feeling sluggish, foggy or groggy, Feeling more emotional than usual and Irritability.

In dealing with “Head Injuries” and “potential head injuries”, I recommend first thing, asking player’s name, what day it is and date of birth. This should give you a quick evaluation of the player’s state of mind. Call the coach onto the field immediately if you suspect any “Head Injuries” or “potential head injuries”. Once coach comes onto the field of play for the injured player then the player needs to be off the field for evaluation. I am very much aware of the FIFA/USSF protocol for goalkeeper exception and two player’s injuries. The player MUST leave the field of play for evaluation.

If the coach or HCP (Health Care Professional) determines that the down player cannot be moved due to the severity of the injury, you must comply with their instructions and wait for the arrival of medical personnel.

As a referee, once you determine that the player might be suffering from “Head Injuries” or “potential head injuries”, **DO NOT ALLOW THAT PLAYER TO RETURN TO PLAY IN THAT GAME UNLESS THE PLAYER HAS BEEN CLEARED BY A HCP.**

This rule is modified in NorCal hosted events/tournaments when there is a HCP on site to make those determinations. NorCal teams MAY have a HCP on their staff. It is the team’s responsibility to inform the referee **BEFORE** the KO as to the the identity of team’s HCP. If no HCP is identified before the KO and a player leaves the field of play due to “Head Injuries” or “potential head injuries”, **THAT PLAYER CANNOT RETURN TO THE PITCH FOR THAT GAME. YOU ARE NOT TO REMOVE THE PLAYER PASS OR HOLD ON TO IT.** You are however required to fill out an incident report by using this link:

http://www.norcalreferees.com/incident_report/

WHAT IF???

1. After the player is off the pitch for “Head Injuries” and “potential head injuries”, coach decides to put him/her back into the game. **DO NOT ALLOW** the player to come back to the game.
2. In number 1 scenario, **WHAT IF**, the coach says that he takes full responsibility for the player’s safety. **DO NOT ALLOW THE PLAYER TO COME BACK ON.**
3. In number 1 scenario, **WHAT IF**, the parent or parents of the player says that they would take full responsibility for the player’s safety. **DO NOT ALLOW THE PLAYER TO COME BACK ON.**
4. In number 1 scenario, **WHAT IF**, the parent or parents or coach or team officials or another team parent of the team says that they are a physician or nurse or athletic trainer or HCP and they are allowing the player to come back to the pitch and will take full responsibility for the player’s safety. **DO NOT ALLOW THE PLAYER TO COME BACK ON UNLESS THE HCP WAS CLEARLY IDENTIFIED**

BEFORE KO.

5. In number 1 scenario, WHAT IF, the president or Director of Coaching of the club order you to allow the player to come back on to the pitch or you will not be paid for the game or you will be fired and he or she will take full responsibility for the player's safety. DO NOT ALLOW THE PLAYER TO COME BACK ON.

Am I getting my point across??? Player safety is our number one job.

Modify substitution rules:

- Modify substitution rules to allow players who may have suffered a concussion during games to be evaluated without penalty.

- If a player suffers a significant blow to the head and is removed from the game to be evaluated for a suspected concussion or head injury, that substitution will not count against a team's total number of allowed substitutions in a NorCal NPL game.

- If the player with the suspected head injury has received clearance from the HCP to return to the game, the player may re-enter at any stoppage of play. The evaluated player must replace the original substitute and will not count as a substitution.

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The HCP should be a licensed healthcare professional such as an athletic trainer certified (ATC), or physician (MD/DO), with the skill set in emergency care and sports medicine injuries and with knowledge and experience related to concussion evaluation and management.

We as Referees will not get involved in determining the HCP certifications or qualifications. Once carded team officials (coach, assistant coach or trainer) identify their team's HCP then it would be the team's responsibility to insure their HCP qualification.

These instructions are effective immediately.

Thanks

Moe Shafai

NorCal Director of Referees