

Safety Committee Report- Sept. 2011

As we approach the coming year much has happened that impacts the committee and Minnesota Hockey. I will summarize these below.

The first item is the concussion issue, new rules enacted by USA Hockey, and the mandatory education and training requirements as set out by the Minnesota legislature. These are all related issues and it is important to know what we have done to date and what the board should be considering. I have attached a copy of the Minnesota Statute for your reference.

- Coaches will comply with the education this year through the USA Hockey on line modules
- Officials will receive training in their fall clinics.
- Parents will have access to the CDC training on concussions by link from our website and the Think First website.
- Parent awareness will also be targeted through the use of articles in both on line newsletters and Let's Play Hockey
- The Concussion Protocol Document has been revised to comply with the statute and is posted on the MNH website and hopefully District sites. We can customize these for local associations if they wish. The revised document is attached.

For the most part we are already in compliance with the statute. There is one part that is generating questions and the board needs to decide how best to handle it. The statute requires a written approval to return to play by a physician that meets these requirements:

(2) trained and experienced in evaluating and managing pediatric concussions; and
(3) practicing within the person's medical training and scope of practice.

I am told by medical people that very few doctors can meet the experience requirement. The second line is pretty vague. By adhering to the letter of the law it could be interpreted that parents will be required to seek out brain trauma specialists of which there are few in Minnesota. This will take time and money. #3 significantly expands the requirement to mean any doctor.

The next issue is more complicated.

- 1) Who will decide if the doctor who gives permission to return to play is qualified to make the assessment?
- 2) What if a family decides a doctor is not necessary?
- 3) Who is supposed to receive this permission? The coach/ Association/ or Minnesota Hockey?
- 4) What in fact is supposed to happen with these permission slips?

It makes sense that if a player is suspected of having a concussion the first step is removal from the game/practice and the parents have the responsibility to make the proper determination of how and when to seek medical care. It also makes sense to me that if a player is removed for a possible concussion that a no same day return policy makes sense and in tournaments no RTP until after the tournament. These would have to be voted on at the board level. I believe we already have a rule that if a player is removed from a tournament game by the on site trainer, there is no return to play the same day.

The statute does allow for more stringent requirements and processes as determined by the organization.

Injury data collection project:

The injury data project we conducted the past three years provided us with a window to nature of injuries in youth hockey. Although lacking in scientific standards it seemed to work and it revealed the growing issue with injuries in certain age and skill levels. I have heard anecdotally that District 6 , 2, 3 and District 10 are going to have their own individual injury data collection projects. As data collection, verification, and statistical summaries are difficult in the best of situations, the safety committee will cease to attempt to do this for the up coming year and each District can determine how best to collect, verify and quantify the data.

Conclusion:

Increased awareness, new rules, and training will certainly have an impact on concussions and hopefully other types of serious injuries. A change in the data collection protocols and process will make it hard to compare to our current data so it will be very difficult to determine if our efforts are successful. Hopefully the incidence of concussions per player games will decrease.

I would suggest that the best defense is a good offense. In this situation it is very clear from the data that skill matters as the lower the skills the higher the injury levels. The primary skill determinant is skating. I would suggest that if we focused on skating skills in every association in the state, our injury levels would drop.

Minnesota Hockey Safety Committee
Hal Tearse, Chair