

Winnebago Lutheran Academy Awareness of Football Risk

Football is a contact sport and injuries will occur. The coaches and staff working in our program are well qualified, professional people. Fundamentals related to playing football will continually be emphasized on and off the field. The information contained within this list of rules and procedures is to inform the young men in our program and their parents of proper techniques to practice for maximum safety. Some professions tend to be very safety conscious, and coaching is one of them. At WLA we go to great lengths to prevent injuries.

By rule, the helmet is not to be used as a "ram." Initial contact is not to be made with the helmet. It is not possible to play the game safely or correctly without making some contact with the helmet when properly blocking and tackling an opponent. Therefore, technique is most important in preventing injuries.

Tackling and blocking techniques are basically the same. Contact is to be made above the waist but not initially with the helmet. The player should always be in a position of balance, knees bent, back straight, body slightly bent forward, head up, target area as near to the body as possible with the main contact being made with the shoulder.

Blocking and tackling by not putting the helmet as close to the body as possible could result in shoulder injury such as separation or a pinched nerve in the neck area. The reason for following the safety rules in making contact with the upper body and helmet is that improper body alignment can put the spinal column in a vulnerable position for injury.

REMEMBER: NEVER LOWER YOUR HEAD!

If the head is bend downward, the cervical (neck) vertebrae are in a bind and contact on top of the helmet could result in dislocation, nerve damage, paralysis, or even death. If the back is not straight, the thorax (mid-back) and lumbar vertebrae are also vulnerable to injury with similar results if contact again is made with the top of the helmet. The WLA workout includes isotonic-type exercises. Football players must have strong, well-developed neck muscles to help prevent injury. We have exercises in our conditioning program expressly for that purpose.

If the knees are not bent, the chance of knee injury is greatly increased. Fundamentally, a play should be in the proper hitting position at all times during live ball play and this point will be repeated continually during practice.

The dangers are anything from strained muscles to ankle injuries or serious knee injuries requiring surgery. The rules have made blocking below the waist (outside a two yard by four yard area next to the football) illegal. Cleats have been restricted to no more than 1/2 inch to further help in preventing injuries.

In tackling, the rules prohibit initial contact with the helmet or grabbing the face mask or edge of the helmet. These restrictions were placed in the rules because of serious injuries resulting from non-compliance to these safety precautions. Initial helmet contact could result in a bruise, dislocation, broken bone, head injury, or internal injury to the kidneys, spleen, bladder, etc. Grabbing the face mask or helmet edge could result in a neck injury, which could be anything from a muscle strain to a dislocation, nerve injury or spinal column damage causing paralysis or death. The illegal play by participating athletes will not be tolerated at WLA and all players are repeatedly reminded of the dangers of unsportsmanlike acts.

Shoulder pads, helmets, hip pads, and pants (including thigh pads and knee pads) must have proper fitting and use.

All players at WLA are fitted for equipment, but they should have at least a basic knowledge of their correct fit. Of course injury could occur even with properly fitted equipment due to using improper techniques (i.e. blocking and tackling), or from a freak accident.

Shoulder pads that are too small will leave the shoulder point vulnerable to bruises or separation. They could also be too tight in the neck area, resulting in a possible pinched nerve. Shoulder pads that are too large will leave the neck area poorly protected and will slide on the shoulders, making them vulnerable to bruises or separations.

Helmets must fit snugly at the contact points: front, back, and top of head. The helmet must be safety "NOCSAE" branded; the chin strap must be of the proper thickness; the player must have a mouthpiece. On contact, too tight a helmet could result in a headache. Too loose a fit could result in a headache, a concussion, a face injury such as a broken nose or cheekbone, or a blow to the back of the neck causing a neck injury, possible paralysis, or even death. Remember: don't leave the equipment room until you and the trainer are both satisfied.

This report does not cover all potential injury possibilities in playing football, but it is an attempt to make the players and their parents aware that fundamentals, coaching, and proper fitting equipment are important to safety and enjoyment in playing football at Winnebago Lutheran Academy.

***** Return one signed copy *****

We understand the rules and procedures as explained above and are aware of the risks involved in playing football. We also understand the necessity of using the proper techniques while participating in the football program.

Signature of Athlete _____ Signature of Parent _____

Date _____