

By Jan Rahn

Managing Editor

Although a new legislative bill has been put in place—coaches, faculty and staff at Perkins County Schools are already being proactive when it comes to safety measures for the well being of the student body.

Starting with the summer of 2012, the new measure mandates that students who have suffered a concussion either while during sports at school or on their own free time away from school won't be allowed to participate until they are cleared of the danger from previous head trauma.

Athletic Director and Head Plainsmen Football Coach Chip Kay said students at Perkins County Schools will be tested when school begins this fall—putting the school ahead of the curve and joining 23 percent of the state's schools already delivering testing.

Kay said a computerized concussion evaluation system will be put into effect that will create a baseline on every student.

The new "ImPACT System" (Immediate Post-Concussion Assessment and Cognitive Testing) will be implemented in collaboration with Perkins County Health Services. The school was approached by the hospital—which is very timely, said Kay.

"We are very grateful to the hospital for their partnership with us on this endeavor," he said.

Training of Kay and the ImPACT assessors will be done by ImPACT, Inc. Remaining coaches will go through the National Federation of High School Sports on-line concussion training course.

The ImPACT system is already being used by 23 percent of the 290 football schools in the state.

Although the formal evaluation tool won't be put into play until fall, Coach Kay knows the risks of putting a player back in the game too soon and has implemented measures for years that prevent the oversight of a possible concussion.

Kay said Perkins County is establishing the ImPACT concussion management system ahead of when it is being forced upon every school in the state by the recent passage of LB260. In response to the bill, Kay said all of the school's coaches will take the educational program.

"Annual testing is a safety net to catch things," said Kay. Each student will be tested each fall to be certain something hasn't occurred over the summer that might be missed.

Although driven by the legislature, Kay said he and other coaches at Perkins County Schools have already been careful in assessing concussions, looking for signs and symptoms and doing follow up.

"The next step for us is to better serve our students."

The advantage of the ImPACT System is that it's more comprehensive and it's available to medical personnel via a website.

Kay gave an example of a situation where a player is hurt at an away game and taken to the local medical facility where personnel will be able to access the student's baseline test and make a determination of the severity of the head trauma based on any previous concussion.

"Nothing we do is going to make it 100 percent impossible for something to happen, but it closes gaps in diagnosing a student athlete," he said. "One big component is getting separate entities to have the same information."

Although the focus seems to be on football, Kay said other athletes are getting concussions, citing two Ogallala girls who bashed heads in basketball.

“It’s not just a football-only issue,” he said.

The training received by the coaches won’t take the place of having emergency medical technicians at the games, said Kay.

“It won’t replace the experts, but we’ll be more knowledgeable and know what steps to follow up on,” he said.

Kay can think of two instances since he began coaching the Plainsmen in 2007 where players missed out on a game due to a concussion.

He said he’s always conscious of symptoms and always fearful of overlooking an injury.

The best the school can do is begin this fall in training coaches, informing the kids and parents, and causing awareness so players know the symptoms and can even self-diagnose.

The information gleaned from the ImPACT test can be accessed on the field and be an asset to the EMTs who do sideline assessment.

Kay said the mandate by the state supports what the school has already begun to swing into motion.

“The bill supports what we’re doing and why. We were going in this direction to improve regardless of the bill,” said Kay.

What Causes a Concussion

- A concussion is a traumatic brain injury caused by a bump, blow or jolt to the head.
- A concussion can occur when a blow to the body causes the head to whip back and forth.
- Repeated concussions pose the greatest danger to athletes.
- Research has shown that having adequate time for recovery is key to preventing additional injury or death.

The Concussion Bill

On a unanimous 43-0 vote, LB260, the Concussion Awareness Act, was passed by the Nebraska Legislature April 8 and signed into law by Gov. Dave Heineman on April 14, requiring that youngsters suffering a concussion be prohibited from playing or practicing a sport until cleared by a health care professional, and also requires that coaches receive training on the warning signs of concussion.

The Concussion Awareness Act applies to youth in all athletics—school-sponsored, as well as programs run by cities, businesses and nonprofit groups.

Sen. Steve Lathrop of Omaha introduced the bill which has full backing by the NFL (National Football League) who is offering strong support of the measure and actively striving toward getting a similar bill passed in all 50 states.

The ImPACT Test

ImPACT (Immediate Post-Concussion Assessment and Cognitive Testing) is the first, most-widely used, and most scientifically validated computerized concussion evaluation system.

Developed in the early 1990’s by Drs. Mark Lovell and Joseph Maroon, ImPACT is a 20-minute test that has become a standard tool used in comprehensive clinical management of concussions for athletes of all ages. ImPACT Applications, Inc. was co-founded by Mark Lovell, PhD, Joseph Maroon, MD, and Michael (Micky) Collins, PhD.

Given the inherent difficulties in concussion management, it is important to manage concussions on an individualized basis and to implement baseline testing and/or post-injury neurocognitive testing.

This type of concussion assessment can help to objectively evaluate the concussed athlete’s post-injury condition and track recovery for safe return to play, thus preventing the cumulative effects of concussion. In fact, neurocognitive testing has recently been called the “cornerstone”

of proper concussion management by an international panel of sports medicine experts.

ImPACT can be administered by an athletic trainer, school nurse, athletic director, team coach, team doctor, or anyone trained to administer baseline testing.

ImPACT is the most widely used computer-based testing program in the world and is implemented effectively across high school, collegiate, and professional levels of sport participation.

Test Features

- Measures player symptoms
- Measures verbal and visual memory, processing speed and reaction time
- Reaction time measured to 1/100th of second
- Assists clinicians and athletic trainers in making difficult return-to-play decisions
- Provides reliable baseline test information
- Produces comprehensive report of test results
- Results can be e-mailed or faxed for fast consultation by a neuropsychologist
- Automatically stores data from repeat testing
- Testing is administered online for individuals or groups
- Compatible with PC and MAC

Source: ImPACT™ Concussion
Resource Center