

NEPSAC Football Practice Contact Policy Proposal

NEPSAC football coaches pride themselves on teaching the proper technique of tackling and blocking in order to make the game as safe as possible. Many of our coaches have participated in USA Football's "Heads Up Football" program that teaches safety and safe techniques to keep the head out of contact. Likewise, many of our coaches have subscribed to the "Hawk Tackling" techniques taught and promoted by Seattle Seahawks coach Pete Carroll.

This proposal goes a step further in terms of mandating both a preseason acclimatization program as well as an in-season practice contact policy for NEPSAC football playing schools. Research suggests that limiting full-contact practices may be among the most practical ways of reducing brain trauma among football players. The rationale for defining and reducing live contact practice is to improve safety, including possibly decreasing player exposure for concussion and sub-concussive impacts. Reduced frequency of live contact may also allow more time for teaching of proper tackling technique.

Definition of a full-pad practice:

Full-pad practice may or may not involve live-contact. Full-pad practices that do not involve live contact are intended to provide preparation for a game that is played in full uniform, with an emphasis on technique and conditioning vs. impact.

Definition of a live contact practice:

Any practice that involves live tackling to the ground and/or full-speed blocking.

Live contact does not include the following:

Air – players should run unopposed without bags or any opposition.

Bags – activity is executed against a bag, shield or pad to allow for a soft-contact surface, with or without the resistance of a teammate or coach standing behind the bag.

Wrap – drills run at full speed until contact, which is above the waist with the players remaining on their feet.

Thud – same as wrap but tempo is competitive with no pre-determined winner and the players are not tackling to the ground.

Preseason Acclimatization Policy

1. Teams may not wear full pads until the third day of preseason practice.
2. Full contact may not occur until the fourth day of preseason practice.
3. There shall never be more than one full contact practice held on a single day.
4. There shall never be more than two consecutive days of full contact practice in preseason.
5. There shall not be more than 90 total minutes of full contact during a practice week.
6. Once a team has its first scrimmage, it is restricted to two full contact practices a week.

In-Season Practice Contact Policy (is enacted five days prior to the first game):

1. There shall be a maximum of three days of full padded practice (meaning one of those three practices must be no live contact).
2. A maximum of two practices shall include live contact (1-on-1, group, 11-on-11).
3. Full Contact during practice shall be restricted to no more than 90 minutes per week.

During the regular season and post season, no football player is allowed to participate in more than 90 minutes of full contact practice per week. "Full contact" is defined as football drills or live game simulations where "live action" occurs. Live action, as defined by USA Football, is contact at game speed where players execute full tackles at a competitive pace taking players to the ground. A team may continue to dress in full pads for practice, but may only participate in live action drills and game time simulations no more than 90 minutes per athlete per week. It is assumed that when players are in shells (shorts, shoulder pads and helmets) no live action drills or simulations will occur. This rule is intended to limit live action drills and not the number of practices a team may participate in full pads. A team may participate in "air," "bags," "wrap," and "thud" drills and simulations at any point. These contact levels have been defined above.