



VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

MEMORANDUM

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January 31, 2013

TO: Head Men's and Women's Water Polo Coaches, Directors of Athletics and Conference Commissioners.

FROM: Bob Corb, national coordinator of officials
NCAA Men's and Women's Water Polo Rules Subcommittee.

SUBJECT: Soft Headgear Interpretation.

Since the beginning of the women's season, several questions have been brought up regarding the wearing of soft headgear for concussion prevention. Please see the interpretation below regarding these types of headgear, and the official statement from the NCAA on soft headgear in non-helmeted sports. **If you are receiving this information as a supervisor of officials, please forward to your conference's evaluators and referees.**

Rule 5-4: Is the use of soft headgear permitted for concussion prevention if the appropriate relates form (Appendix F) is completed?

The statement below is from the NCAA Committee on Competitive Safeguards and Medical Aspects of Sports on the subject of helmets/soft headgear. Soft headgear includes concussion headbands/devices. Based on this statement from the NCAA, the use of helmets/soft headgear for concussion prevention is not permissible, and waivers may not be granted for this purpose.

All equipment worn by an athlete must comply with the applicable rule. This includes Rule 4 (Caps) and Rule 5-4 (Apparel--items likely to cause injury). Any item worn underneath the water polo cap must be in compliance with Rule 4. Exceptions to Rule 5-4 may be granted but a completed release form (Appendix F) must be available for presentation to the referees prior to any game in which the athlete wishes to participate. As stated above, the use of helmets/soft headgear for concussion prevention is not permissible, and waivers may not be granted for this purpose. The NCAA will continue to monitor developments in this area and will consider adjustments to its position should valid scientific evidence arise.

N a t i o n a l C o l l e g i a t e A t h l e t i c A s s o c i a t i o n

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Soft Headgear in Non-Helmeted Sports.

The NCAA does not view the use of soft headgear products as equipment for the prevention of concussion in non-helmeted sports. As explained below, soft headgear products may be worn in non-helmeted sports whose rules allow for such optional equipment, but the purpose of that equipment should be for reasons other than concussion prevention. In non-helmeted sports requiring a medical waiver for the use of such optional equipment, use of soft headgear as a condition to be medically cleared to play sports is ineffective. Therefore, the NCAA will not provide medical waivers for the use of soft headgear for the prevention of concussion in order to be medically cleared to play sports. It should be noted that there is no helmet which can prevent a concussion. There continues to be a need for valid scientific evidence that the use of such products decreases the incidence of concussion.

Concussion is a brain injury. It is important to note that there is a lack of clinical evidence supporting the value of the soft or padded headgear in the prevention of sports-related concussions. The NCAA recommends caution in utilizing these devices to permit medical clearance of a student-athlete if they would otherwise not be medically cleared to participate in their sport. Currently, wearing such headgear is not medically necessary to prevent concussions in order to play; however, this equipment may be used to cover lacerations and sutures as they are deemed appropriate within the sport's playing rules.

Current design and recommended use of these devices fail to address the proposed mechanism of concussive injury, that being rotational acceleration and deceleration forces acting on the brain. Institutions should refer to equipment standards from NOCSAE, ASTM, HECC, and CPSC when considering protective equipment for student-athletes and ensure the equipment is used for mitigating the risk of injuries for which they are designed.

When considering the use of this optional equipment during practice or permitted competition, athletes and coaches should take the time to read the qualifying statements provided with such a product addressing its limitations, particularly to prevent serious head injuries. Wearing such a device may provide a false sense of security in the area of concussion protection by the player, their coaches and their parents. In addition, placing headgear on a student-athlete may indirectly justify striking them in the head by opponents, especially in sports where this has never been the intent (e.g., soccer, basketball, women's lacrosse, etc).

Moreover, a false sense of security in the area of concussion protection increases the likelihood that players, coaches, and parents will consider the medical condition to be adequately addressed and may place less importance upon avoiding head impact, reporting concussion symptoms, and returning to play prior to full recovery following a concussion.

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The NCAA will continue to monitor developments in this area and will consider adjustments to its position should valid scientific evidence arise.

David Klossner

NCAA Director of Health & Safety

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In order to monitor and gather injury data for water polo, we are requesting that each head coach or director of athletics email the head water polo athletic trainer's name and contact information to Ashlee Ferguson at the NCAA (aferguson@ncaa.org). This will help to possibly develop an injury surveillance reporting program for the sport. Also, please provide the athletic department's water polo sport supervisor's contact information. This will help with communication from the NCAA to athletic departments and head coaches.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact myself (ncaacoordinator@earthlink.net) or Ashlee Ferguson (aferguson@ncaa.org) at the NCAA.

BC:af

cc: Supervisors of Officials
Selected NCAA Staff