

Football Helmet Safety: Not What You Think

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There was an excellent article last Thursday in the New York Times about youth helmet safety:

http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/21/sports/football/21helmets.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=football%20helmet%20injuries&st=cse

It serves as an excellent education and awareness piece regarding helmet safety standards and several illusions many coaches, parents, and players may have about the protection helmets provide to players.

The article is lengthy but VERY worthwhile. I've excerpted some notable passages:

Helmets both new and used are not - and have never been - formally tested against the forces believed to cause concussions. The industry, which receives no governmental or other independent oversight, requires helmets for players of all ages to withstand only the extremely high-level force that would otherwise fracture skulls.

*Recent engineering advances made by Riddell, Schutt, Adams and other manufacturers have undoubtedly improved the performance of the football helmet. **But helmets communicate a level of protection that they do not provide**, experts said, in part because of lax industry standards and practices.*

***The fact that helmets are held to no standard regarding concussions surprised almost every one of dozens of people interviewed for this article**, from coaches and parents to doctors and league officials. Even one member of the Nocsae board, Grant Teaff - who represents the [American Football Coaches Association](#) - said he was unaware of it.*

***Nocsae's sole means of quality control is to require each reconditioning facility to perform the Nocsae drop test** - in which a helmet is placed on a fluid-filled polyurethane head-form and dropped along wires from a height of 60 inches - on a random sample of about **3 percent of their helmets** to see if they still absorb enough force to protect against skull fracture.*

The test is failed by about 1 in 300 reconditioned helmets, according to Naera reports.

All of the passing helmets - along with the vast majority that undergo no testing at all, just a visual assembly-line inspection - receive a sticker that indicates they continue to meet Nocsae standards, and are returned to the league or school.

***This largely faith-based process allows for significant errors. Hundreds if not thousands of supposedly reconditioned helmets emerge still unfit for use**, according to interviews with coaches, parents and helmet-industry principals.*

Again, just an effort to increase awareness among all parents, players, coaches, and physicians.