

Michigan athletic group says concussion program works

By Roger Schneider, Associated Press on 09.14.16

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In this October 1, 2015, photo, members of the Birmingham Groves freshman team tackle a Southfield-Lathrup player during a football game in Beverly Hills, Michigan. Groves is one of 62 Michigan high schools participating in a unique pilot concussion program that does baseline testing of athletes in football and other sports. Photo: AP Photo/Carlos Osorio

DETROIT — The Michigan High School Athletic Association says its unique sideline concussion testing program for athletes in football and other sports is having a positive effect, though long-term funding is an issue as it enters its second and final year.

Member schools in the pilot program removed players for possible concussions at a higher rate than schools that were not, Executive Director Jack Roberts said.

"They're proving that they're good, but people are going to have to respond with support locally," Roberts said. "We cannot sustain this forever."

His group on Monday released results of its first-ever head-injury survey of more than 750 member high schools from 2015-2016 sports. It received data from nearly every school.

The association started the program last fall with 62 high schools. It includes baseline testing of athletes in football and other sports to help with concussion diagnosis.

The association spent \$10,000 last school year to start the program. It expects to spend \$30,000 this year but will have fewer schools — 34 — involved because of the expense and commitment. It will also concentrate on sports that have the highest incidence of head injury.

"I hope that we can demonstrate their value and encourage sponsorship, grant support," Roberts said. "But it's going to take, I think, some investment by the people in the communities. The moms and dads are going to have to think that this is important and worth contributing to make the programs safer for their children."

Here are details on what's happening in Michigan:

What Is Baseline Testing?

Baseline testing is a combination of memory, reaction time, attention and stress assessments. It is done in major pro sports because it is considered an objective and individualized tool to help decide whether to remove an athlete from a game. While all states have laws that address preventing concussions in youth sports, many are weak and none require baseline testing.

Why It Matters

Michigan schools reported 4,452 head injuries in boys and girls sports, or 5.9 per school. Contact sports had the most head injuries. Ranking first was 11-player football, with 49 head injuries per 1,000 participants. Next was ice hockey, with 38, and eight-player football, with 34. Girls soccer had 30 injuries per 1,000 participants, and girls basketball ranked fifth, with 29 injuries per 1,000.

But that is likely only part of the picture. Health and safety advocates fear concussions often go undetected in high schools because of inconsistent protocols at districts unwilling or unable to spend money for detection. It's often the responsibility of players to self-report concussions, or of coaches, who have many responsibilities and sometimes little training in the ability to recognize symptoms.

Why Not All Schools?

Schools typically don't argue with the benefit of testing, but cash-strapped districts often say the cost of offering such programs is prohibitive.

Programs Available

Many sideline concussion-testing programs are on the market. Michigan is testing the Illinois-based King-Devick Test affiliated with the Mayo Clinic and Maryland-based XLNTbrain Sport. The association provides them for free to the participating schools. Long term, Roberts thinks the association could fund it in part with a \$3 to \$5 fee per student. But the association is also working to get grants.

How It Works

Baselines with the XLNTbrain Sport are determined during 30-minute sessions by athletes at computers. The tests measure reaction time, attention, memory and stress by completing a series of exercises that involve such things as word recognition. Athletes suspected of a head injury undergo a sideline assessment done in about five minutes with an iPhone or tablet app. It assesses memory by providing words for the athlete to remember. It asks questions that require the athlete to recall the hit. The athletes also hold the phone as they stand for 20 seconds with eyes open and then closed to check balance. That assessment is compared with the athlete's baseline data to help determine whether they can return to play.

What's Next In Michigan?

Roberts hopes that universities, health care systems and the National Federation of State High School Associations will help analyze the data from last year and this year. The association plans specifically to work with Michigan State University's Institute for the Study of Youth Sports to explore possible changes and additions in coaches' education.

Quiz

- 1 According to the article, all of the following have contributed to the success of the concussion testing program EXCEPT:
- (A) implementing sideline concussion tests that assess memory and balance
 - (B) establishing laws that require all Michigan schools to adopt concussion testing
 - (C) exploring ways to provide funding to schools to cover the cost of the tests
 - (D) conducting baselines that measure reaction time, attention, memory and stress
- 2 Which of the following statements BEST represents Jack Roberts' attitude about the concussion testing program, as portrayed in the introduction [paragraphs 1-8]?
- (A) The program is partially effective, so schools should be willing to begin implementing it.
 - (B) The program is partially effective at protecting players, so more research is needed.
 - (C) The program is effective at protecting players, so schools should be willing to pay for the tests.
 - (D) The program is effective at protecting players, so the MHSAA should expand the available funding for schools.
- 3 Read the following sentence from the section "Why Not All Schools?"

Schools typically don't argue with the benefit of testing, but cash-strapped districts often say the cost of offering such programs is prohibitive.

What is the connotation of the word "prohibitive" in the sentence above? Which line from the text supports your answer?

- (A) positive; The association spent \$10,000 last school year to start the program.
- (B) positive; The association provides them for free to the participating schools.
- (C) negative; It expects to spend \$30,000 this year but will have fewer schools — 34 — involved because of the expense and commitment.
- (D) negative; Health and safety advocates fear concussions often go undetected in high schools because of inconsistent protocols at districts unwilling or unable to spend money for detection.

4 Read the selection from the section "Why It Matters."

But that is likely only part of the picture. Health and safety advocates fear concussions often go undetected in high schools because of inconsistent protocols at districts unwilling or unable to spend money for detection. It's often the responsibility of players to self-report concussions, or of coaches, who have many responsibilities and sometimes little training in the ability to recognize symptoms.

Which two words from the selection have the MOST similar meanings?

- (A) responsibility and protocols
- (B) detection and recognize
- (C) advocates and symptoms
- (D) inconsistent and unable