



UPFRONT

April 4, 2011

Title: Protecting our Young Athletes

This last week the House passed a bill that I think is one of great interest to all parents whose children participate in athletics. The threat of brain injury, especially concussions, has been a worry of moms and dads since they have watched their kids participate in sports, especially contact sports.

The term "getting your bell rung" seems to happen more often these days, as athletes have grown bigger and are faster than they used to be. Athletes today are encouraged to train year round and the weight room is often a required regimen.

Concussions are one of the most commonly reported injuries in children and adolescents who participate in sports and recreational activities. According to the legislation, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that as many as 3,900,000 sports-and-recreation-related concussions occur in the United States each year.

Literature reveals the following facts about concussion.

- Concussions are caused by a blow or motion to the head or body that causes the brain to move rapidly inside the skull.
- Concussions injure the brain and can range from mild to severe and can disrupt the way the brain normally works.

- Concussions occur in organized and unorganized sport or recreational activities and typically result from a fall, or from players colliding with each other, the ground, or other obstacles.

Concussions occur with or without loss of consciousness.

Young athletes are particularly vulnerable to injury and even death if they continue to play after the initial concussion or head injury. The Legislature recognized and addressed the concern with youth athletes who are prematurely returned to play, resulting in actual or potential permanent physical injury or death.

When I played football in the 1950s, a player over 200 pounds was considered big and was usually a lineman. Today we have running backs at University of Iowa weighing in at 225 pounds who run like the wind. Linemen, both offensive and defensive, play at 245 pounds and up. Iowa's offensive line averaged 290 pounds. All this weight and speed lead to collisions of tremendous impact.

But it's not just football. All the other sports bring risk to head injury. Soccer, rugby, basketball, soft ball and baseball, all sports, both men's and women's carry the danger of brain injury.

Professional teams are paying more attention to concussion. The National Football League has implemented stricter return-to-play rules and the National Hockey League is considering restrictions on hits to the head.

House File 581 covers more than just sports. It applies to any extracurricular activity. Extracurricular activity is defined as any extracurricular interscholastic activity, contest, or practice, including sports, dance or cheerleading.

While most schools have medical personnel at high school events, the house bill requires no requirement for this. Mount Pleasant always has a doctor in attendance at football games and many times an ambulance and EMR personnel are standing by. Smaller schools are not so fortunate but if injury occurs a first responder is to be called.

House File 581 is very specific as to pulling a student out of participation. The bill reads “if a student’s coach or contest official observes signs, symptoms or behaviors consistent with a concussion or brain injury in an extracurricular interscholastic activity, the student shall be immediately removed from participation.” Signs and symptoms of a concussion developed by the National Centers for Disease Control are issued as a guide that indicates that a concussion may have occurred. The CDC also has an action plan if you suspect that a player has a concussion and recommends the following steps:

- Remove athlete from play.
- Ensure athlete is evaluated by an appropriate health care professional. Do not try to judge the seriousness of the injury yourself.
- Inform athlete’s parents or guardians about the known or possible concussion and give them the fact sheet on concussion.
- Allow athlete to return to play **ONLY** with written permission from an appropriate health care professional.

Equipment manufacturers are also making improvements that would further prevent brain injury. Riddell, the official equipment manufacturer of the National Football League, has released a new type of helmet designed to reduce concussions. The Riddell 360 reduces the force of impact to the front of a player’s head where 70 percent of hits occur. The company also adds that 70 percent of concussions result from hits to the front of the helmet. Riddell also makes note that no helmet will prevent concussions from occurring. Currently, at about \$400, the helmet is costly, but by providing the best features possible the safety quotient may outweigh the cost for now.

We must remember that for many of these persons who suffer from concussions, many times the true injury does not appear until the person is older and in the later stages of life. One can only look at Muhammad Ali to see the effect concussions can have on a person when they grow older, and are out of competition.

Visitors to the Captiol this week were: Access of Energy Board of Directors from Mount Pleasant and Carla Mertens from West Point.

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If you have any issues or concerns, please contact me.

Be sure to include your name and address with any communication to my office.

State Rep. Dave Heaton, R-Mount Pleasant, represents the 91st House District, which includes all of Henry County and the northern half of Lee County.