

Football is a sport with inherent dangers, including the risk of head and neck injuries. Equipment manufacturers have stepped forward with various products intended to address such risks. Questions arise from time to time as to whether a given product may, rather than diminishing the incidence of injuries, in fact enhance it.

There has been some discussion lately about the efficacy of attachments to the exterior of football helmets. Until this year, we were unaware of any regulation of such products at the professional, college, high school or youth levels. Recently, the NFHS has been looking at a number of such products to see if they conflict with NFHS football rules by causing helmets to be altered in such a way as to decrease protection.

The NFHS does not perform scientific tests on any specific items of equipment to determine if the equipment poses undue risks to student-athletes or others. Such determinations are the responsibility of the equipment manufacturers. That being said, the NFHS football committee has been concerned about helmet attachments. To this point, the NFHS, like the other football rule-makers and the Consumer Products Safety Commission, has not been able to form a definitive conclusion as to whether a number of such products are, on balance, beneficial or detrimental. The Committee looked at three products: ProCap, Shockstrip and Guardian Cap. From a common sense standpoint, padding would seem to be helpful. On the other hand, the larger circumference of a padded helmet increases the likelihood of contact, and there may be a change with respect to the coefficient of friction. Because of the inconclusiveness of the available information, the NFHS Rules Review Committee does not feel itself in a position to determine that the products in question violate its rule by decreasing protection.

There are other entities independent of the NFHS which may have a voice in the discussion, including the National Operating Committee on Standards for Athletic Equipment (NOCSAE), along with other standards-setters, and the football helmet manufacturers themselves.

In the absence of a clear answer to the “net impact on protection” issue, the decision as to whether to use or not use helmet attachments remains, at the high school level and all other levels, within the discretion of the various teams, coaches, athletes and parents.

With respect to concussion minimization in football, helmet attachments and accessories are only part of the discussion. So are coaching techniques for blocking and tackling, equipment fit, competitive balance and a variety of other factors. A useful refresher on recognition and treatment of concussions may be found online at www.NFHSLearn.com: *Concussion in Sports—What You Need to Know*.