Cracking the Books on Concussions
High School Athletes, Safety and Risk

By: Mary Rogers

Fifteen Kent State reporters contacted twenty-six Ohio schools for their policies on concussions.

Diane Reha, facility manager for East High School in Youngstown said to her knowledge they don’t track concussions because there’s no need. The school’s athletic director, Ed Matey, reported the district had no record of concussions for the past nine years. (Go to the CAR project complete drive and click the concussion folder and then click the Best_Stuff folder and link the document inside of BS_Rogers.pdf. This is the document on Youngstown Schools letterhead where #3 has the sentence saying no concussions in 9 years.)

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that nearly 2 million brain injuries occur in teenage athletes each year.

Twenty-four school districts were contacted regarding the tracking of all concussions; fourteen reported all concussions are tracked. However, only ten sent concussion policies indicating how tracking is done. Normandy High School of Parma was one of two schools that didn’t know if they had a policy.

“Let me put it like this, I’m not aware of any records kept like that,” David Allenick, supervisor of athletics at Normandy High School said.

We contacted Dr. Jeff Graham, superintendent of Parma schools, but he didn’t get back with us. Instead, he instructed Allenick to answer our questions. Allenick wasn’t surprised he was asked to do so.

“You know what he’s a Superintendent of a large school district and I’m sure he has other things to do. I can guarantee he knows nothing about our concussion policies,” Allenick said.

Even with the recent NFL lawsuit drawing in attention on athletic concussions, some school faculties are unsure of the existence of their concussion policy.
“Don’t necessarily have a policy,” Medina High School Director of Student Services Kris Quallich said.

Along with Quallich’s uncertainty, Meadowville High School of Dayton didn’t know if they could track all concussions.

While some school faculty members were either unsure of their policy or didn’t if they could track all concussions, some were sure of the financial risk for their district regarding concussions.

Among the schools that were contacted eleven confirmed that they’d been warned about litigation risks regarding concussions. Those districts were Columbus, Bay Village, Lakewood, Gahanna, Parma, Canton, Cuyahoga Falls, Mogador, and Brunswick.

Brunswick’s Athletic Director Pietro Demonte said he goes to extremes because he deals with kids.

Athens Superintendent Carl Martin said concussions are always a concern, but the school doesn’t have an individual policy. Martin reports Athens only follows the Ohio High Schools Athletics Association’s policy.

Every high school athletic department in Ohio has to follow the OHSAA policy.

The OHSSA policy states that any athlete exhibiting signs consistent with a concussion such as headache, nausea, dizziness, fuzzy vision, memory problems, confusion and, sensitivity to light or noise, shall be removed from contest.

Coaches are to be aware of these symptoms so that they can prohibit the athlete from playing in the game. Only medical professionals are allowed to diagnose a player with having a concussion.
If an athlete is diagnosed with a concussion he or she is not permitted to return to contest until given doctors permission.

Many of the schools reported that they have partnerships with local hospitals who train their coaches to recognize these behaviors. Cleveland Clinic was among the hospital mentioned. Cleveland Clinic also designs helmets for Glenville High School in Cleveland. These helmets are designed to reduce the risk of head injury.

Partnership with hospitals is one of the major efforts districts are making to increase safety for students.