

New TSSAA rule restricts padded practices

Tom Kreager, DNJ 9:36 p.m. CDT July 27, 2014



(Photo: HELEN COMER / DNJ / File)

MURFREESBORO – High school football coaches will be faced with the task of installing their offense and defense while testing the toughness of their players in less time in pads this season.

A new TSSAA rule has placed a limit on the amount of time each day that a team can practice in pads. The rule, similar to what is in place with the NCAA as well as in other states, forbids athletes to participate in multiple practices in pads on consecutive days. If a team has two practices in pads on one day, the next day it must practice just one time in pads.

Monday marks the first day of practice in full pads for high school football teams across the state.

Story: [Coaches, players weigh in on what first practice means \(/story/sports/2014/07/26/players-coaches-share-thoughts-first-practice/13228135/\)](/story/sports/2014/07/26/players-coaches-share-thoughts-first-practice/13228135/)

Rutherford County coaches have mixed feelings on the new rule. But all understand the reason of it and the attempts to eliminate heat-related illnesses.

"I'm not a huge fan of the pad rule simply from the standpoint that we only get one week before school really starts, or at least teachers go to school," Blackman coach Philip Shadowens said. "So, you take away really pushing a kid mentally to push through the soreness and tiredness because they are going to be only one time in pads every other day. I don't know if you get the same exact mental challenges for kids, which may affect a Friday night because you haven't been able to see who can handle it when they are really tired. But at the same time, if it's all about protecting kids I'm all about that. I understand the meaning of the rule.

"But here in Tennessee when you only get one week to do that when you have colleges that have four or five weeks I don't know if it makes sense for us."

Weather permitting, Shadowens said this week the Blaze will practice three times each day — in the morning, afternoon and evening. The afternoon practice is a shorter one without pads designed to go over special teams. Blackman can wear full pads in the other two practices, but if the Blaze do it today, only one practice would be in pads on Tuesday.

Per TSSAA rules, the total practice time in pads may not exceed five hours.

The TSSAA also defined what it considered practice in pads to helmets and shoulder pads being worn at any time during the practice. A practice also is considered to be in pads if helmets and pants with hip, thigh and knee pads are worn.

La Vergne football coach Stanton Stevens said his team also have two practices scheduled per day. Stevens said he agrees with the TSSAA's decision to change the rule.

"Sometimes we as coaches lose focus," Stevens said. "This is high school football. Very few play at the next level. They have the rest of their life to live.

"I think we'd be smart to take up where (the NFL and colleges) are leading us. And I think that should trickle down to little leagues. That's where I see the most abuses of it."

Oakland coach Thomas McDaniel has altered his practice schedule from past years. The Patriots will only go one time a day this week.

"We're going to be there for quite a while," McDaniel said. "But on the field, we're just going to go once. You can physically beat them up for days at a time and wear them down, but then you risk possibly getting players injured.

"Times have changed. People change."

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Friday's scrimmage schedule

Friday will mark the first day for prep football scrimmages involving Rutherford County teams. Here is Friday's scrimmage schedule:

MBA at Siegel, 9 a.m.

Beech at Oakland, 9 a.m.

Blackman at Franklin, 5 p.m.

Riverdale at Lincoln Co., 5 p.m.

Centennial at Smyrna, 5 p.m.

Page at Stewarts Creek 6 p.m.

Eagleville at Columbia Acad., 6 p.m.

Follow @Kreager on Monday

• DNJ prep editor Tom Kreager will chronicle the first day of high school football practice in pads on Monday by traveling to the Rutherford County high school football practice fields. Follow him on Twitter @Kreager to find out how the first day in pads went for teams.

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