

HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS FEBRUARY 28, 2017 4:29 PM

Controversial bill could allow parents to decide when student-athletes return from concussions



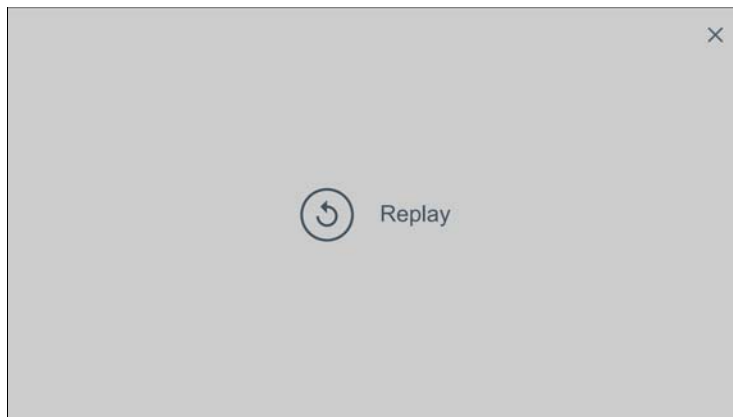
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A new bill being considered by the N.C. House of Representatives seeks to make high school athletics safer by requiring anyone involved in school athletic activities to complete training regarding concussions, sudden cardiac arrest and other heat-related illness.

But one part of House Bill 116 is causing controversy: It would allow parents or legal guardians, in addition to health care professionals, to determine when a student-athlete could return to playing following a concussion.

Currently, schools handle concussions based on the Gfeller-Waller Concussion Awareness Act, which became law in 2001. Gfeller-Waller says a student-athlete can't return to competition until he or she is evaluated by a licensed medical professional or an athletic trainer.

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In a 2013 study, researchers from the National Academy of Sciences found high school football players were twice as likely to suffer concussions than their collegiate equivalents.

According to data provided by Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, 85 football players suffered concussions in the 2015 season, down from 90 in 2014. In all, CMS said 243 student-athletes had concussions during the 2014-15 school year and 282 during the 2015-16 school year.

Joe Kolodziej, a former Michigan State lineman, suffered multiple concussions. He doesn't think House Bill 116 will do anything to decrease these numbers. He worries it might send them the other way.

Kolodziej had to stop playing because of a football-related brain injury in 1980. Kolodziej, who lives in Charlotte, has a son, Anthony, who is a senior at Charlotte's Providence Day and has played high school football for the Chargers. Kolodziej is a salesman for Echelon Sports Armour, a company that specializes in football safety equipment aimed at limiting the risk of head injuries.

"It's the coaches that ought to be up in arms about it," Kolodziej said. "They think about the ramifications: a parent clears a player and a parent has no training in concussion management. The kid could go back too soon and be injured to a greater extent. This is not good for North Carolina. This would basically let a parent override an athletic trainer. The athletic trainer can't clear a player now without working with the doctor."

Que Tucker, commissioner of the N.C. High School Athletic Association, said she prefers the current rules over 116.

"First of all," she said, "it is clearly understood that parents have to be in charge of their own children in terms of their safety and welfare, and we understand that," Tucker said. "When it comes to a parent returning a student to play or practice and that's not accompanied by a doctor's return to play signature, I think that's potentially not a good situation.

"So the stance of the N.C. High School Athletic Association is that Gfeller-Waller is sufficient in how it returns students to practice and play. We feel good about how that law was enacted and it becomes very difficult for parents to be put in the position of returning their son or daughter to play, especially when that son or daughter is saying, 'I feel fine. I want to play. Let me play.'

"Doctors are a neutral voice and are always looking out for the best interest of students. We're better off when that occurs."

CMS Concussion Tracking

A sampling of sports where CMS tracked concussions during the 2014-15 and 2015-16 school years:

Sport	2014-15 concussion total	2015-16 concussion total
Baseball	8	8
Boys' Basketball	11	8
Girls' Basketball	11	18
Cheerleading	15	17
Football	90	85
Boys' Soccer	12	27
Girls' Soccer	28	33



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