

Flemington Midget Football

Helmet and Tackling Safety

The game of football has changed radically from the one we played as kids. Today, even at the youth level, players are bigger, faster and better prepared than in the past. At FMF, we continue to work to create a better, safer game to protect our children as well as the future of our sport. Football is a physical game. While we can never completely remove the risks inherent to the sport, we are constantly working to minimize the potential dangers as much as possible. When a parent brings their child to practice or a game, our first responsibility as an organization is to return him safely. We realize that responsibility and take it very seriously.

At FMF, player safety begins before the team ever hits the field. All of our coaches have completed the Rutgers S.A.F.E.T.Y (Sports Awareness for Educating Today's Youth) course and are certified by the Rutgers University Youth Sports Research Council. In addition, all of our coaches have passed extensive background checks and are allowed by the state of NJ to be around children in a supervisory role.

Once on the field, our commitment to safety extends to our coaches teaching the latest blocking and tackling techniques, designed and proven to be both safe and effective. All of the Head Coaches running our teams have been trained and certified by USA Football (the youth football development partner of the NFL). As part of their training, our coaches have been taught not only to know what the latest techniques are, but also how to teach them so that the players understand both the "how" and the "why". When a player is unsure of why he is being asked to use a certain technique, it is less likely that he will comply, even if it is to his benefit.

Recently, concussions have become a hot button topic in the news. Though a recent study¹ published by the Mayo Clinic in April 2012 shows empirically that impacts received through football do not increase a player's chances of developing neurodegenerative issues, the issue of concussions is something we take extremely seriously. All of our head coaches have undergone training not just on concussion awareness, but also on concussion AVOIDANCE. Avoiding concussions altogether by teaching safe and proper technique is the first line of defense against concussions. This season, as a USA Football affiliate, FMF will be fully adopting the "Heads Up!" tackling program in order to help make the game safer for our players. In the wake of recent media reports, coaches and teams around the country are adopting "Heads up!" tackling as a safer, more effective technique in order to reduce the possibilities of head to head contact during tackling. "Head's Up!" tackling was developed by the USA Football's Tackle Advisory Committee in conjunction with NFL Health and Safety. We invite you to learn more about the "Heads Up!" Football program at www.usafootball.com.

An ill-fitting helmet is one of the most preventable causes of concussion in youth football. Our coaches have been trained by representatives from Riddell and USA Football to fit your child's helmet properly. FMF is proud to provide every player with the youth version of the Riddell Revolution family of helmets exclusively (Revolution and Revolution Speed). The Revolution was the first helmet

¹ "High School Football and Risk of Neurodegeneration: A Community-Based Study" Mayo Clinic Proceedings April 2012;87(4):335-340

designed specifically in an attempt to reduce concussions, the Revolution Speed improved upon the original technology. In a recent study² done at Virginia Tech University on adult football helmets, Riddell Revolution and Revolution Speed models were rated 4 and 5 stars respectively, making them among the best helmets available on the market for concussion safety.

It has always been our policy at FMF that any helmet used in any game or practice be professionally reconditioned, inspected and re-certified by our reconditioning vendor (at our cost) before being put back into service. The reconditioning vendor we use is the same one that reconditions and re-certifies the helmets of High Schools, Colleges and even Professional teams in the area. Many people don't realize that football helmets can and do expire. Unaware of this fact, some organizations may put helmets into use that have outlived their useful life. At FMF, our policy has always been that once a helmet reaches its expiration date it is removed from service, destroyed, and replaced with a new one. Because of this, we replaced over 20 helmets last year (at a cost of over \$200 each) and will replace another 30+ helmets this year.

While we pride ourselves on providing our players the best equipment available, even the best designed equipment in the world isn't safe if it doesn't fit properly. Our staff has been trained to properly fit all equipment so that their safety features are utilized to the fullest. As an example, improper fitting shoulder pads (either too large or too small), can lead to increased chances of shoulder and neck injuries. Bigger pads don't always mean safer pads. We realize that something as simple as mouth guards are an important, but often overlooked, piece of safety equipment. They do more than just protect teeth; they have been proven to have an important role in minimizing and even preventing concussions. We issue every player an age-appropriate mouth guard in order to both prevent dental damage AND to reduce the risk of concussions. Any player with braces will require, and will be issued, a braces-specific mouth guard.

Even with all that we do to keep the game of football safe for our players, we realize that accidents and injuries can happen, and take steps to be prepared. In the event an injury does occur, FMF keeps a certified EMT on staff, present at all games and on call for all practices. We are also the only program in the area to own an Automated External Defibrillator (AED) along with the proper youth sized AED paddles required for its use.

The health and safety of the players entrusted to us is an enormous responsibility, one that FMF has always and will continue to take very seriously. We are proud of our current efforts but are constantly looking for new ways to improve. Our goal is to provide lifelong lessons and memories to our children while helping to keep our sport vibrant, healthy and safe.

² VT study results (updated for 2012) can be found online at: <http://www.sbes.vt.edu/nid.php>