

Chicago Tribune

New Bill's Focus: Concussions In High School Athletes

By JON LENDER

January 28, 2010

Although concussions in high school football attract the greatest attention, advocates of a new bill designed to protect youths say girls soccer players are the next most likely to sustain such **brain** injuries among student athletes below the college level.

High school student athletes sustain at least 100,000 concussions a year in the United States — the majority of them in football, followed by girls soccer, boys soccer, girls basketball and wrestling, according to information compiled by Democratic state senators proposing legislation in the General Assembly session that opens next week.

The bill's sponsors, Sens. Martin Looney of New Haven and Thomas Gaffey of Meriden, supplied no detailed sport-by-sport breakdown on the numbers of concussions. But they said the prevalence of head injuries to athletes of both genders is a reason Connecticut should become the third state — after Oregon and Washington — to adopt their bill.

The legislation would:

- Prohibit students from participating in a game or practice on the same day they exhibit signs of a concussion or are diagnosed with one.
- Require athletes with suspected concussions to receive medical clearance before returning.
- Require coaches to be trained in recognizing concussion symptoms and seeking proper treatment.

"Concussions, in high school athletes, are a serious and dangerous injury," said Dr. Thomas Trojian, physician for the **UConn women's** basketball team and one of several experts who spoke at a state Capitol press conference this week to support the proposal. It would apply to athletes in high school and lower grades.

"Many of these student athletes return to play the same day as their concussion," Trojian said. "This inappropriate return to play puts their developing brains at risk for prolonged or permanent damage and even death. We can work together to help educate coaches, parents and student athletes of the dangers of head injuries, like concussions, and protect student athletes with this legislation."

The lawmakers said they would hold a public hearing to consider whether their bill also should include athletes in non-school recreation leagues such as Pop Warner football.

Concussions, the lawmakers said, were the second-most common injury among high school athletes last year, behind ankle strains and sprains, according to a study by the Center for Injury Research and Policy at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio. They said the research also indicates concussions have increased by 25 percent among high school sports injuries in the past few years.