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Proposed Idaho law takes aim at youth concussions

Idaho bill would set guidelines for athletes' head injuries.

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Idaho bill would set guidelines for athletes' head injuries.

A history of concussions and the concern of his father could not keep Kort Breckenridge from suiting up for Teton High against Sugar-Salem on Oct. 7, 2005.

During the football game, Breckenridge, a senior, suffered another head injury on a routine defensive play. Soon after, he collapsed on the sideline and started convulsing. In the subsequent weeks, he underwent extensive surgery, including the removal of part of his skull to relieve pressure on his brain.

"I watched people do things to him that I hope no parent has to watch people do to their child," Ray Breckenridge told Idaho lawmakers Thursday.

Ray and Kort Breckenridge were in Boise to support proposed legislation to require training for coaches, parents and athletes as well as impose stiff guidelines for an athlete's return to practice or games after suffering a concussion. Athletes would need the approval of a licensed health-care provider to return to action if House Bill 676 becomes law.

The House State Affairs Committee postponed a decision on the bill until Monday.

The state of Washington passed a similar law — the Lysted Law — in 2009.

"A concussion, no matter the severity, needs to be treated ultra-conservatively with kids," said Brent Faure, a certified athletic trainer since 1986 and the former head athletic trainer at Highland High in Pocatello.

Caroline Faure, an assistant professor of sports science and physical education at Idaho State, has studied concussions extensively. She said one in five high school football players suffer a concussion at some point in their career and that young athletes who have a concussion are four to six times more likely to have another.

"These are the known cases. Thousands more are believed to go unreported," she said. "We know the brain of the child is much more delicate. Kids in this age range take longer to heal."

Players who suffer a concussion should be held out for the rest of that game at least and checked on a daily basis, said Pam Arriola, president of the Idaho Athletic Trainers' Association. Athletes should not be allowed to return until their symptoms are completely resolved.

Centennial High in the Meridian School District has a fulltime athletic trainer on staff. Players get a baseline test before the season and, after suffering a concussion, must pass a test again to be allowed back on the field, football coach Lee Neumann said.

Neumann, who previously coached at rural Murtaugh High in Twin Falls County, which did not have a trainer, said coaches across the state need to be aware of concussion signs.

"It would benefit coaches to be able to understand and recognize it a little more. It's becoming more and more of an issue," Neumann said.

Former Eagle High, Boise State and NFL player Jeb Putzier supports the efforts to better inform young athletes, parents and coaches of the dangers. Putzier is working for CereScan, a Denver-based company that does brain imaging to help diagnose concussions and their damages. He has been talking to NFL players about the dangers of concussions.

"You need to take that rest, take that time off and let your brain heal," said Putzier, who estimates that he has had more than 100 concussions, including small ones, during his playing career. "We're all biologically different. You don't know the full extent of a concussion."

Even if the bill does not pass, the State Board of Education and the Idaho High School Activities Association have pledged to increase concussion awareness among coaches, athletes and parents. The Boise-based IHSAA now gives officials the authority to remove players from a game if they notice symptoms of a concussion.

"This is really out in the forefront with our organization right now. We're going to do everything we can to provide more information," said John Billetz, executive director of the IHSAA. "We're going to continue to do things along those lines and emphasize them more than we have in the past."

Quick action on the sidelines by Ray Breckenridge, a surgical nurse, on that October 2005 evening helped save his son's life. Now he wants other high school athletes to realize the potential dangers associated with concussions.

"We see the desire, we see the thrill and we see the drive that we all admire," Ray Breckenridge said. "Sometimes that precedes or exceeds the physical development of the brain."