Recommendation 4: Protective athletic equipment should be removed prior to transport to an emergency facility for an athletic-patient with suspected cervical spine instability.
August 5, 2015

**Statement to Accompany Executive Summary: Appropriate Care of the Spine-Injured Athlete**

The NATA has received input from our membership and other organizations regarding the recent release of the Executive Summary from the Task Force on the Appropriate Prehospital Management of the Spine-Injured Athlete. The Task Force believes that the positions taken foster a “best practices” approach for our patients now and in the future. While we support the many locations that have already begun training initiatives for equipment removal, the Task Force does appreciate that the implementation of the positions nationally will take time and dedication. We believe that the input merits altering the wording to allow for greater flexibility.

To that end, the Task Force core writing group has proposed revising Recommendation #4 from reading “…equipment should be removed prior to transport” to “when appropriate, protective equipment may be removed prior to transport.” The Task Force recognizes the variations in state emergency medical system protocols nationally, the availability of qualified EMS systems and hospital emergency departments locally, the differences in personnel and resources at various venues and levels of competition, and the uniqueness inherent in each situation and with each patient. These, along with medical-legal liability issues, lead us to conclude that it is prudent to state that health care providers make the decision regarding equipment removal on site based on the individual circumstances of the case.

Once the “Appropriate Prehospital Management of the Spine-Injured Athlete” statement is completed, reviewed, and approved by the professional organizations represented at the task force meeting, educational materials will be developed by NATA and other groups to assist those health care providers whose education and professional training may not include various components of the recommendations outlined in the consensus statement.

View the Executive Summary in full along with the update here. A list of frequently asked questions is currently in development. You may contact Katie Scott, MS, ATC, LAT, at katies@nata.org with any additional questions.
NFHS SMAC Update Regarding the NATA Document on the Care of the Spine Injured Athlete

August 12, 2015

As many of you are aware, on June 24, 2015 the National Athletic Trainers’ Association (NATA) issued a document entitled “Appropriate Care of the Spine Injured Athlete.” We applaud the NATA for addressing this critical issue, and working to update the original consensus statement from 1998. At the NFHS Annual Summer Meeting, which was held during the week following the NATA document release, Bob Colgate and I included the highlights of the NATA document in my NFHS Sports Medicine Forum talk. Subsequently, the NATA announced that the document had not been fully vetted by all participating organizations, and the NATA has now issued a proposed revision that changes Recommendation 4.

I still feel the overall directions and positions taken by the NATA document are correct and represent a “best practices” approach to the care of the spine injured athlete. I also support the proposed revision of the language in Recommendation 4 of the NATA document which adds “when appropriate, protective equipment may be removed prior to transport.” It is critical that when and if they are on site, the team physician, athletic trainer and all members of the medical staff and EMS use their best clinical judgment to decide if helmet and shoulder pad removal should be performed on the field of play or within an emergency department. That being said, it is not realistic for all high schools across the country to be held to the same standards of staffing and personnel as professional teams or NCAA Division I universities. At many high school games, there are not enough trained personnel to safely remove equipment on the field. Therefore, in line with the proposed revision from the NATA, the responsible persons should use their best judgment and proceed accordingly.

William M. Heinz, M.D.
Chair, NFHS SMAC