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U.S. Soccer Federation Statement on Use of Padded Headgear

An emerging issue in the world of soccer is the use of padded headgear by players. USSF has received a number of inquiries from its members about whether use of headgear is either appropriate or recommended.

FIFA Laws of the Game, Law 4, “The Players’ Equipment,” does not include headbands in its list of basic compulsory equipment. However, under the “Safety” clause of Law 4, players who opt to use padded headgear should be permitted to do so, so long as the referee confirms that the equipment is not “dangerous to [the player] or another player.”

While players should be given the option of using headgear, it is not permissible for any USSF member or affiliate to require use of headgear by players. USSF Bylaw 104 states that FIFA Laws of the Game shall apply to soccer games that occur under the purview of USSF. FIFA Laws of the Game, Law 4, provides a specific list of mandatory equipment (including jersey, shorts, socks, shoes, and shin guards). Headgear is not on this list, and it is not within the authority of USSF’s members to amend the Laws of the Game in this way.

It is important to point out that there is much to learn about headgear. A recent study sponsored by FIFA’s sports medicine committee concluded that headgear provides no measurable benefit in head-to-ball impacts, but does provide “measurable benefit” in subconcussive head-to-head impacts. However, there are still many unanswered questions – most importantly, the extent to which this sort of headgear diminishes the risk of concussions, if at all. USSF’s Sports Medicine Committee continues to monitor the available literature and push for further research on such questions as whether decreasing impact force translates into decreasing concussions and whether use of headgear creates a false sense of security among players or causes them to play more aggressively.

It is also important to remind players, coaches, and parents that headgear is not a substitute for proper medical evaluation and treatment of concussions. Consultation with a doctor is always a best first step after suffering any sort of head injury.

USSF and its Sports Medicine Committee will continue its efforts to stay educated in this area and to update USSF members when appropriate.