

# Waunakee Football Safety Philosophy

In the Waunakee Football Program, the safety of our players is the top priority from our Youth Football Program all the way through our High School Program. There has been a lot of negative publicity recently in the media in regards to the game of football. The Waunakee Football Program makes sure our players are protected to the greatest possible extent through prevention, protection, and proper recovery. Additional information on each of these key elements to our safety approach is addressed in the areas noted below.

## **1) Equipment**

The equipment provided to your child is among the best available. The helmets we use are top of the line, tested annually, and are NOCSAE (National Operating Committee on Standards for Athletic Equipment) approved. The technology of the equipment is constantly improving, and thanks to great relationships with highly reputable sporting goods dealers, we are in step with all of the top levels of equipment. Every year our helmets are sent in to be certified and, if necessary, reconditioned. The bottom line is that if they do not pass certification and cannot be reconditioned, they will not be used in our program.

## **2) Equipment Fitting and Continued Monitoring Process**

Besides being certified and reconditioned yearly, the helmets our players are issued at the beginning of the season are fitted by a veteran coaching staff that is certified in the process of fitting helmets. This means that your child will try on his equipment and it will be checked for proper fit before being issued your child. The equipment is checked regularly throughout the season by the training staff and / or coaches to make sure no potential equipment issues arise during practices or games.

At the beginning of the season, each high school player takes an ImPact test as directed by leading concussion management standards. The ImPact test is a state-of-the-art, scientifically validated program that satisfies the required concussion management standards in the state of Wisconsin. Also prior to the beginning of each season, athletes are provided with the opportunity to purchase custom fit mouth guards. These custom mouth guards are proven to reduce injuries beyond even the injury reduction potential of standard mouth guards. Whether or not the mouth guard is custom fit, all athletes are required to wear a mouth guard to participate.

At Waunakee High School, we have a UW Sports Medicine Athletic Trainer at all practices and games. In addition to our on-site trainer, we have a team doctor at our varsity games. Our team doctor is also available for weekly consultations with athletes at all levels. Our medical staff is continuously receiving education on and researching equipment, injury prevention, and the technology necessary to find better and safer approaches to the game of football.

### **3) Coaching Staff and Game Personnel**

All of our coaches are USA Football Certified and are educated not only in the strategies and techniques of the game, but in the safety of the game as well. A major part of our program success has long been the teaching of fundamentals. The proper teaching of fundamentals not only leads to success on the field, but success in regards to player safety as well.

In the Waunakee Football program, our coaches teach safety in the areas of blocking and tackling, the two areas of football that involve the most contact. Coaches in our program limit contact in two key dimensions. First, we use close quarters for drills, which reduces impact, and also match up players by size when necessary and/or possible. Waunakee is also a program that limits overall contact in practice. The game has evolved, as have we; this is not “old school football”. By limiting our contact in practice we hope to make our practices as safe as possible.

In game situations, the opponents we play against in our leagues are also concerned about player safety. Our opponents are concerned not only about their players’ safety, but the safety of our players as well. These coaches must also be certified coaches, meaning they possess the tools necessary to teach the right way to play the game.

The officials of our games at all level are also there to promote rules for fair play and player safety as well. Every year the National Federation of High Schools introduces new rules, and it is typical that some of the annual rule changes deal with player safety.

Lastly, our weight room and strength training program both greatly help with safety issues. As part of our strength-training program, we encourage great nutrition to help in the recovery and strengthening phases of athletics. We feel that our facilities, medical staff, coaching staff and our strength and conditioning program make this great team sport as safe as possible for our athletes.

### **4) Force Equation and History**

As of late, there has been a lot of media coverage regarding injuries in the game of football. Just like any sport, injuries do occur in the game of football. In Waunakee, we have had our share of bumps and bruises along the way, but of the thousands of players we have had come through our program none have suffered permanent injuries. There have been occasional instances where a player is injured. In those situations when a player is hurt or if we are uncertain as to the extent of an injury, the player will be held out. We are committed to making sure our players are able to return to good health before they move forward with participation.

The national media covering the NCAA and the NFL have focused a lot on the concussion aspect of football. While concussions are possible at all levels, the reality is that lower level football players are not being subjected to the same types of hits as players in the NFL or NCAA. The size and speed of the players at the highest levels of the game are not the same as players we will play against. The truth is, the force of a sixth grader making a hit, is not the same as an NFL

player. As previously stated, this does not mean concussions will not occasionally happen, but the reality is the number of concussions we have seen in recent years has been minimal. As previously stated, no athlete will return to practices or games until medical professionals clear the athlete to return. Athletes, coaches and parents have no ability to engage in this decision.

In summary, we believe our equipment, fitting processes, and staff is the best available at our level. Please let us know if you have additional questions regarding our safety philosophy.