

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FULL CONTACT FOOTBALL PRACTICES

### Alabama High School Athletic Association recommendations for full contact football practices

Alabama High School Athletic Association (AHSAA) Bylaws currently do not limit the amount of full-contact practice during the football season. The recommendations below should serve as guidelines regarding the amount of time during which full contact practice (11-on-11) is allowed.

Rationale: The proposal by the AHSAA Medical Advisory Board seeks to increase the level of health and safety of student –athletes – high school and junior high/middle school – who participate in the sport of football at AHSAA member schools.

Recommendations: During the regular season, including championship play, and the allowed 10-day spring evaluation period, the AHSAA recommends that member schools restrict the amount of full contact football practice (11-on-11).

The recommendations regarding full contact football practice (11-on-11) are as follows:

Week 1 – In accordance with the AHSAA Fall Football Practice Rule, the first two days of fall football practice should be in shorts and helmets. Shoulder pads and helmets are allowed on the third practice day for a period not to exceed 90 minutes of total practice time.

The AHSAA recommends that shoulder pads and helmets be used on the fourth practice day for a period of time not to exceed 120 minutes (2 hours) of total practice time. On the fifth practice day, one full contact practice, not to exceed 90 minutes of full contact (11-on-11) is recommended.

Week 2 – Alternating days of full contact practice, not to exceed a combined total of 120 minutes of full contact practice (11-on-11) per week. In addition, one intra-squad scrimmage would be allowed in week 2.

Week 3 – Alternating days of full contact practice, not to exceed a combined total of 120 minutes of full contact practice (11-on-11) per week. One interscholastic scrimmage contest would be allowed in week 3.

Week 4 through End of Season – 90 minutes of full contact practice (11-on-11) per week.

Spring Evaluation – Alternating days of full contact practice, not to exceed a combined total of 120 minutes of full contact practice (11-on-11) per week. One interscholastic scrimmage contest would be allowed during the spring evaluation.

Teams may continue to dress in full pads for practices, but should only participate in live action in accordance with the above-stated time guidelines for full contact practice. It is assumed that when players are in shells (shorts, shoulder pads, helmets) no live action will occur. These guidelines are intended to limit live action and not the number of practices a team may participate in using full pads. A team may participate in “air,” “bags,” “wrap,” and “thud” drills and simulations at any point. The contact levels are defined below.

The AHSAA makes no recommendation regarding limitations of full contact during football drills involving groups of less than 11-on-11.

For the purposes of these recommended guidelines, the following definitions are provided:

**Full contact** – Live game simulations where live action occurs (11-on-11).

**Live action** – Contact at game speed where players execute full tackles at a competitive pace, taking players to the ground.

**Air** – Players should run unopposed without bags or any opposition.

**Bags** – Activity is executed against a bag, shield or pad to allow for a soft-contact surface, with or without the resistance of a teammate or coach standing behind the bag.

**Wrap** – Drills run at full speed until contact, which is above the waist with the players remaining on their feet.

**Thud** – Same as a wrap but the tempo is competitive with no pre-determined winner and the players are not tackling to the ground.

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### Texas University Interscholastic League – Football Practice Limits Effective August 1, 2013

During the regular season and post season, no football player is allowed to participate in more than ninety (90) minutes of full contact practice per week.

For the purposes of the rule, “full contact” is defined as football drills or live game simulations where “live action” occurs. Live action, as defined by USA Football, is contact at game speed where players execute full tackles at a competitive pace taking players to the ground. A team may continue to dress in full pads for practice, but may only participate in live action drills and game time simulations no more than ninety minutes per athlete per week. It is assumed that when players are in shells (shorts, shoulder pads, and helmets) no live action drills or simulations will occur. This rule is intended to limit live action drills and simulations and not the number of practices a team may participate in full pads. A team may participate in “air,” “bags,” “wrap,” and “thud” drills and simulations at any point. These contact levels are defined below:

**Air** – Players should run unopposed without bags or any opposition.

**Bags** – Activity is executed against a bag, shield or pad to allow for a soft-contact surface, with or without the resistance of a teammate or coach standing behind the bag.

**Wrap** – Drills run at full speed until contact, which is above the waist with the players remaining on their feet.

**Thud** – Same as wrap but tempo is competitive with no pre-determined winner and the players are not tackling to the ground.

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### Ivy League

Practice Limitations – Existing Ivy League rules, which reduce the number of permissible practices otherwise allowed under NCAA limits, already provide for a reduction in the number of opportunities for helmet or head hits to occur as compared to other NCAA Division I teams. In addition, a reduction in hitting during practices has happened naturally over the years as coaches, at least in the Ivy League, have generally been modifying practice plans to reduce hitting to keep players healthy. Existing routines for full-pad, contact practice sessions minimize the emphasis and incidence of tackling.

The recommended practice limitations are intended to reduce the overall number of opportunities for helmet or heat hits to occur, beyond the current NCAA and Ivy League restrictions already in place. Further, these new limitations, some of which codify existing Ivy practice philosophies, will be included in Ivy legislation, thereby requiring future expansion regarding full-contact during practices to be approved through the Ivy legislative process.

The Core Group recommends the following additional restrictions for football practices:

1. In-Season – Limit of two full-contact days per week – The number of full-contact practice days will be limited to two per week during the season. During the remaining days there may be no full-contact practices or live tackles and no player may be “taken to the ground.” There will be no full pads but helmets, uppers, girdles and thigh pads will be permissible for safety reasons. No kneepads will be allowed. This represents a 60% reduction from the NCAA limit of five days per week.
2. Spring Practice – Reduce by one the number of allowable full-contact practices in the spring – Four spring practices (instead of the current Ivy League limit of three) must not involve full contact or live tackles and no player may be “taken to the ground.” There will be no full pads but helmets, uppers, girdles and thigh pads will be permissible for safety reasons. No kneepads will be allowed. This is a 12% reduction in practices involving contact from the current Ivy League limit (a reduction from eight to seven full-contact practices) and results in a 42% reduction in the number of contact practices allowed under NCAA rules.
3. Preseason – Limit regarding two-a-days – There will be a new rule limiting to one the number of days that pads can be worn during both sessions of two-a-days during the preseason.
4. Emphasize teaching proper technique – The head football coaches agreed to spend more time during practices emphasizing and teaching proper techniques for avoiding helmet hits. They will also annually show to their teams instructive videos of permissible and non-permissible hits.
5. Adjust practice plans when depth is low – Coaches will continue to be sensitive to the need for adjusting practice plans when depth at a given position is low (e.g., due to injury or other absences) to reduce the number of hits experienced by a particular player.
6. Adherence to the recommended guidelines for in-season full-pad, contact practice sessions – Coaches will follow the recommended guidelines for in-season full-pad, contact practice sessions specified in Attachment C.

RECOMMENDED GUIDELINES  
IN-SEASON FULL PADS CONTACT PRACTICE SESSIONS

Coaching emphasis is on the execution of proper assignments and techniques, ensuring safety and minimizing the risk of injury to all players.

Emphasis for all team (11 on 11), group or individual contact practice periods is for all participants to remain on their feet during the entire repetition or play. Players are instructed to not leave their feet to initiate a block or tackle.

The point of contact for all blocks and tackles is above the waist. Contact must be initiated from a position in front of or facing their opponent. Blocks and tackles initiated directly from the side or behind their opponent are not permitted.

Contact to the quarterback whether in the pocket or throwing on the run from behind the line of scrimmage is not permitted. Defenders are instructed to only touch the quarterback with two hands, run by the quarterback, or pull-up and stop in front of the quarterback to avoid contact.

Contact to ball carriers is permitted only from a position in front of the ball carrier, usually by one defender. Contact is taught to be above the waist with an emphasis on proper tackling technique. Ball carriers are not brought to the ground. Defenders pursuing from the side or behind the ball carrier are instructed to continue proper pursuit angles but not to initiate contact. Pursuing defenders are allowed to practice stripping the ball from the ball carrier with their hands and arms.

Contact to receivers who are reaching or jumping to catch the ball in a defenseless position is not permitted. Once a pass is thrown defenders are taught to pursue to the ball in the air at full speed and play the ball. Defenders are instructed to run by the receiver or pull-up and stop prior to initiating contact. Once a receiver catches the ball and turns up-field to run, the rules pertaining the ball carriers apply.

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### **Pac-12 Conference Football Practice Policy**

\*Subject to approval by Pac-12 Athletic Directors

Statement and Purpose – The Pac-12 Conference is dedicated to protecting the safety, health and well-being of its student-athletes. To this end, the Conference, its Presidents and Chancellors, Athletic Directors, and Football Coaches have agreed to establish parameters for football practice and participation that go beyond the limitations currently imposed by the NCAA. This policy codifies many of the principles already practiced by our head football coaches.

Core Principles – Proper football technique and mechanics, especially when blocking and tackling are involved, should be the priority at every football practice. The core, upper body and lower body should be utilized for contact and players should be taught to avoid using the helmet to initiate contact. Players initiating contact should neither utilize their helmet in play-making nor target the recipient of a block or tackle above the shoulders.

### Rules

- A. NCAA Rules – Except where expressly limited below, Pac-12 institutions shall continue to abide by the football practice rules and regulations outlined in the annual NCAA Division I Manual.
- B. Definition of “Full Contact” – The Pac-12 will define “full contact” as any live tackling, live tackling drills, scrimmages or other activities where players are generally taken to the ground. “Full contact” shall not include “thud” sessions or drills that involve “wrapping up” where players are not taken to the ground and contact is not aggressive in nature.
- C. Fall / In-Season Practices – Pac-12 institutions shall only have two (2) full contact practices per week during the football regular season (“regular season” being defined as the period between the first regular season game and the last regular season game or pac-12 Championship Game (for participating institutions).
- D. Preseason Practices – For days in which Pac-12 institutions schedule a two-a-day practice, full contact shall only be allowed in one practice (the other practice is limited to helmets and shoulder pads). If full-contact practices are scheduled consecutively around one of the two-a-day full contact practices, only one of those practices shall be more than 50% full-contact. By way of example, if a morning session of a two-a-day practice is full-contact, the morning session practice or the preceding one-a-day practice would be limited to no more than 50% full-contact.
- E. Spring Practices – Pac-12 institutions shall schedule spring practices so that of the eight (8) permissible full-contact practices, only two (2) of those full-contact practices occur in a given week. (NCAA rules define these eight (8) practices as practices involving “tackling”.) This rule will be subject to instances where inclement weather or other unforeseen circumstances have constricted or otherwise altered a previously finalized spring schedule that complied with this rule.