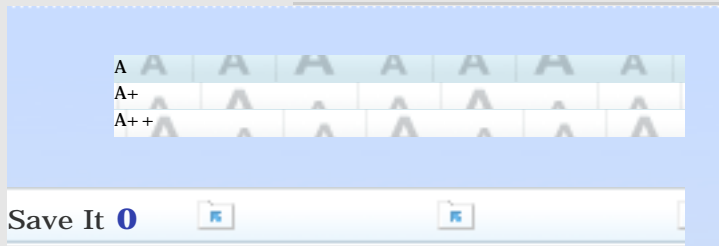


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NFL Sets Standards for Concussion Mangement

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(CBS4/DenverBroncos.com)
ENGLEWOOD, Colo. The concussion wide receiver Rod Smith suffered last season in a 9-6 victory over Kansas City wasn't as severe as some others head athletic trainer Steve Antonopulos has seen during his career; Smith was ready for action the following week at New England.

But that was just one of the "six or so" concussions Antonopulos said he and the Broncos team of doctors -- including a concussion specialists -- treat every season. There are likely more, but players may not report them.

Researchers have learned more about concussions over the past two decades but Antonopulos says that a detailed evaluation process -- including physical and psychological examinations -- is still

required to discover and treat injuries.

"The NFL has always been a leader in providing research money for companies or research venues to develop new helmets, improve the standard of care, understand what's going on with concussions and advancing that to the medical staffs through education and seminars," Antonopoulos said. "There was a concussion meeting -- which I was asked to be part of but wasn't able to go -- in April. The concussion committee in the NFL basically looked at the things that were being done and the outcome of that was the standard of care was very high."

The league felt it necessary to set standards on concussion treatments. The guidelines were announced Tuesday in Nashville, Tenn.

The guide, recommended by an independent committee on mild-traumatic brain injury, includes rules for information sharing between team trainers and physicians and more

guidelines to improve player safety.

The standards formalize what many teams already do when it comes to head injuries.

"NFL clubs do an excellent job in the care and management of concussions that affect NFL players," Commissioner Roger Goodell said in a statement. "It is important that we articulate for our clubs and players, and for the broader medical community, the standards our clubs are applying as we work together to protect the health of our players. The overriding principle governing management of concussions in the NFL is that medical considerations must always have priority over competitive situations."

Competitive and medical considerations are specifically addressed at the beginning of the report noting a player's health following a concussion should be the only reference in determining his playing status. An anonymous "whistle blower" system will be created for

players or doctors to report inappropriate pressure to get back on the field.

The recommendations also require baseline testing on every player in order to better understand the severity of an injury they may suffer in the future.

"I think that's smart," Broncos safety John Lynch said. "When you sign up, everyone knows we're playing a violent game and there are risk of things like that. I think you just have to be smart. That's both sides - - the players (and) the teams. It's like anything, the more information you can get is a good thing."

Lynch said his lone concussion occurred in college, but he's seen what a brain injury can do.

"I've been through it with guys who have had severe ones and it's not a fun deal," he said. "It's kind of a vicious cycle. Once you have one good one you're much more prone to having one in the future. That's the danger in it."

The Broncos have long been aware of the risk,

but welcome a set of guidelines to clarify and formalize how concussions are handled across the NFL.

So when players like Smith, Lynch or any other Bronco gets a concussion, they're in good hands.

"There have always been standards and we've always followed the guidelines... I've always felt like they were there," Antonopoulos said. "It's just making it more standardized across the league. I think the bottom line is they're trying to make sure that the players' medical interest is the heart of what's going on."

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Rod Smith (file)

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