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NFL tries to improve players' understanding of injury

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By Gary Mihoces, USA TODAY

Beginning next season, NFL clubs will be required to do "neurological baseline testing" on all players as a tool in determining if their mental functioning is at a normal level after concussions.

The ImPACT testing program was developed at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center and first was used in the NFL by the Pittsburgh Steelers in the early 1990s. Most NFL clubs had been using it but some only for positions at higher risk of concussions, such as quarterbacks and wide receivers.

The tests measure functions such as verbal memory, visual memory and reaction time. A player might be shown 12 words in succession on a screen, then asked how many he can recall when shown a list of 24. When a player takes the test after a concussion, the scores are compared to his pre-concussion results.

The NFL also says it will set up an anonymous reporting system so decisions made about players following concussions are done on a medical basis.

"The whistle-blower concept is there to ensure that if anyone feels under pressure or seems under pressure to return to play before they are physically capable, then we will find that out on a confidential basis and look at it," NFL commissioner Roger Goodell said at a recent owners meeting.

The NFL also says it will produce a brochure to educate players and their families about concussions and emphasize an existing rule that every chin strap be "completely and properly buckled" to keep the helmet properly fitted.

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