

Mission Prep uses new concussion technology to protect student athletes

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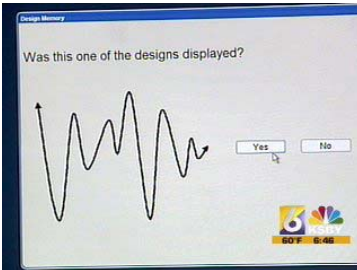
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CENTRAL COAST



Federal Health Officials estimate that between 1,500,000 and 3,000,000 high school athletes suffer concussions each year. Most of them are football players. That is why, this year Mission College Preparatory is using a new tool, one that is also used by NFL teams, to manage head injuries when they occur. In a matter of weeks, it has already made quite an impact.



Star running back Luke Hetzel had a rough game against Coast Union in Mission's second game of the year. The senior was leveled by the Broncos Noel Torres while returning a kickoff. He'd end up in the Emergency Room that night. But it was another hit in the game that raised caution flags.

"I got hit earlier in the game on the head so I had to take the concussion test for that later. But they did a sideline test that night and I was able to get back in the game," said Hetzel about the hit that doctors say left him with a concussion.



In order to play in the next game, school administrators sat Hetzel in front of a computer. Not to check his email, but rather to check the impact of the hits. IMPACT stands for immediate post concussion assessment and cognitive testing. It is a computer program with a 20 minute test of an athlete's memory, reaction time and concentration.



Mission football players first completed it in the preseason to establish a baseline score. Players, like Hetzel, then retake it if they are believed to have suffered a concussion. If the second test results are similar to the first and players show no symptoms, they are cleared to play. In Luke's case, he scored higher the second time and played the following Friday.

In Casey Norton's case, he scored lower after sustaining a concussion during a preseason practice. He will miss his entire senior season.



"I'd rather it happen last year because this year I was improving a lot and I would have liked to have played. I was probably going to play a lot more," said Norton, who played lineman.

A majority of pro and collegiate athletes take the online test. Mission is one of just 33 high schools in California and the only on the Central Coast to use it.

"I'm glad that we got to be a part of that. Hopefully other people will see it, see that it works. A lot of NFL teams, professional teams are using it. So we hope it opens itself up to the community and really all over for any contact sports," said Mission's Athletic Director Brady Lock.

Team Physician Doctor Otto Schueckler said the test helps prevent second impact syndrome, where a second concussion suffered before complete recovery from the first can be deadly.

"What we're attempting to do with the test is identify those players that have symptoms so that they don't return too early. The adolescent and teenage brain is developing so it's much different than the adult brain. And it's more susceptible to these types of injuries," said Doctor Schueckler.

And though the test impacted their seasons differently, both Norton and Hetzel see its effectiveness the same way.

"I think it's a good idea that we're doing it because it's just safer," said Norton. Hetzel added, "You can break a bone and you can tell you're hurt. But with a concussion you can't always tell so it's really good that they're letting us know if we're okay to play or not."

Mission administrators and doctors prefer to play it safe off the field rather than risking a life on it. They also plan to use the test for all contact sports, including soccer. They say it costs just a few hundred dollars per school to enroll.

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