

ImPACT

By John Doherty

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CONCUSSION FREE FOR ALL IN INDIANA

If you've been a regular reader of this column, the first time you saw any mention here of the ImPACT Concussion Management program was in June of 2001.

Back then, Lockport Township High School (Lockport, IL) was the only high school on either side of the state line to use the computerized neuropsychological test.

Since then, the number of participating schools in both states has grown exponentially, with 38 in Illinois and 35 in Indiana. Locally though, only Indiana high schools are involved, with Chesterton, Crown Point, Highland, Hobart, Merrillville, Munster, and Valparaiso being listed on ImPACT's website.

For many of the schools not listed, affordability has been an issue. Initially sold for a one-time licensing fee, ImPACT now is only available through an annual subscription that costs between \$500 and \$1000. Even then, even at those prices, there is a limit on the number of tests a participating school may conduct.

However, for the 2008-09 school year in Indiana, financial constraint should no longer be an obstacle.

On Friday, IHSAA Assistant Commissioner Bobby Cox sent a memo to every athletic director in the state which read in part, "Thanks to a generous gift from Clarian Health Partners in Indianapolis, we are excited to let you know that all of your student athletes will be able to receive a free baseline ImPACT Concussion Management test. This test will enable ImPACT-certified physicians to compare a young athlete's computer brain function test prior to a concussion with the same test after a concussion. This critical comparison aids the physician in ensuring a more accurate assessment and treatment of the injury along with a safe return to play."

The details are still being worked out but Clarian's ultimate goal is the formation of an Indiana Sports Concussion Network. Finding qualified and committed medical professionals to participate in all corners of the state may be easier said than done but baseline testing every athlete before the start of the school year, at the 300-plus schools which don't already have ImPACT, is probably impossible.

Cox acknowledged as much in his memo, writing, "(C)onsideration will be given to those students participating in contact sports initially and progressing through a school's entire group of athletes in a tiered fashion with regard to levels of potential contact."

An interested school - and that should be any school not already using ImPACT - received contact information regarding participation in the memo from Cox.

An interested parent - and that should be every parent of a child participating in a contact sport - should be calling his or her school's athletic director to make sure that the school is participating.

For years, concussion management has relied on guess work and the honesty of the victim. ImPACT is a tool that removes much of the guess work and, at the same time, makes it easier for the athlete to give a more accurate self-appraisal. For more information about ImPACT, go to www.impacttest.com .

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