



US LACROSSE SPORTS MEDICINE SYMPOSIUM

Jan. 11, 2013 • Philadelphia, PA

Head Protection in Women's Lacrosse



Randall Dick, FACSM

- Health and Safety Sports Consultants, LLC
- US Lacrosse Sports Safety Committee

No Disclosures



Protective Head Equipment and Injury: A Review of the Literature

Helmet use has been shown to decrease head and brain injury risk among bicyclists, and head injury among skiers and snowboarders, but the **effect of helmet/headgear use specifically on concussion risk is inconclusive** in these sports, as well as sports such as rugby, football (soccer) and rodeo.

There is **no evidence of an increased risk of injury with helmets and faceguards**

There is scientific evidence that **full facial protection in ice hockey may protect athletes from more severe concussions**, as measured by time loss from competition. Such findings justify the use of mouthguards and facial protection in collision sports as a means to reduce injuries, **but at this time cannot be advocated specifically for concussion risk reduction.**

Benson et. al. Br. J. Sports Med. 2009



Foundation Statements (1)

In both men's and women's lacrosse, the ball is the size and consistency and travels fast enough to cause significant damage to an unprotected head or face. The lacrosse stick itself is hard and also can do damage to an unprotected player.



Foundation Statement (2)

- Men's lacrosse has a moderate and women's lacrosse a relatively low rate of overall time loss injury in high school and college compared to other team sports
 - However, when time loss injuries do occur, 25-30% (M) and 30-35% (W) occur to the head and face.
- Women's / girls lacrosse wants to maintain a unique identify that is distinct and different from the men's / boys game.



Foundation Statements (3)

- Protective eyeguards in women's lacrosse and other sports have been shown to be effective in significantly minimizing ocular injuries.
- There is evidence in the sport of ice hockey that adding head and face protection does not increase the risk of other types of injuries (Feeling invincible, playing more aggressive)



Foundation Statements (4)

- Hard helmets and facemasks have been successful in reducing subdural hematomas and significantly minimizing ocular, oral and nasal injuries of all types as well as head and face lacerations and contusions.
-
- There is anecdotal but not solid scientific evidence that helmets have been effective in minimizing the risk / severity of concussion.



Why are hard helmets and traditional facemasks not required for women's lacrosse?

While contact to the head is illegal in both men's and women's lacrosse, many of the other rules of the games are very different. Hard helmets / facemasks have not been required or deemed necessary in women's lacrosse because:

- No purposeful player contact,*
- Relatively low injury risk relative to other sports*
- Fouls if a seven-inch imaginary sphere around the player's head is breached.*



Unique Women's Lax Safety Rules to Minimize Injury Risk

- *The “bubble” rule as noted above,*
- *No pocket in the stick, making it easier to dislodge ball,*
- *Mandatory cards (penalties) for slashing, dangerous play and dangerous follow through*
- *Penalties for offensive shot taken in an uncontrolled way or without regard of an opposing field player,*
- *Penalties for defensive field player guarding goal with any part of the body which denies the attacker opportunity to shoot safely in free space*



2011 Women's Lax Safety Rules to Minimize Injury Risk

- Strongly recommend using at least two US Lacrosse trained umpires on games played at the high school and youth level.
- Increasing the severity and accountability for major fouls for the individual player, coach and team.



FARES AS
LOW AS
\$39*

**NOT ON ORBITZ OR EXPEDIA.
ALWAYS ON AA.COM.**

[Book Now](#)

*Each way based on round trip. Taxes and conditions apply.

A Case Against Helmets in Lacrosse



Larry French

Helmets, except for goalkeepers, are banned in women's lacrosse. "This to me is like, come on, you're not serious," Dr. Jack Ryan said. "This is 2011."

By ALAN SCHWARZ

Published: February 16, 2011



A Case against Helmets in Lacrosse

“Wearing a helmet,” Richardson said, “would just bring us closer to football and hockey.”

Research suggests that even though men’s lacrosse helmets are required only to eliminate skull fracture and intracranial bleeding — like football helmets — the headgear is probably decreasing the concussion rate to some extent



A Case against Helmets in Lacrosse

One of Camille Richardson's teammates at Columbia, the senior attacker Olivia Mann, said that after the move to make eyewear mandatory for the 2005 season,

“It's subconscious, but you see harder checking, and rougher play.”



Is it permissible for a woman to wear head or face protection?

A soft helmet made of foam type material and / or face protection that was close fitting would be permissible as long as the equipment was not deemed dangerous to other players.

This optional protective equipment could be worn by any field player either returning from an injury or hoping to minimize injury risk.



What about a woman wearing a men's lacrosse helmet / facemask?

The traditional men's lacrosse helmet and face mask would not be allowed because they are hard and have protruding edges that would be deemed dangerous to other players that are not wearing them.



SUMMARY



Four Guiding Principles Form the Foundation of Women's Lacrosse

- Honor the origins of the game.
- Commitment to the core values.
- Maintain relevance of the game today and in the future.
- Respect all participants.

Respecting these guiding principles, the game today continues to be one of finesse and speed, using minimum equipment and prohibiting intentional body contact.



U.S. Lacrosse Position

- In youth sports, oppose any headgear that would “upset the balance between safety and game integrity, or bring some unintended consequence.”
- “Everybody looks at equipment intervention as the end-all, be-all — but it’s not, and the football discussion bears that out.” U.S. Lacrosse would rather emphasize education and rules enforcement and keep the game unchanged.

“People are less focused on those because they’re less tangible, and the picture of a helmet on a kid makes them feel better. But it’s much more complicated than that.”

Steve Stenerson 2011 NY Times article



Pro Helmet

Regarding U.S. Lacrosse's continued ban on hard helmets and face guards. Dr. Jack Ryan, representing the AOSSM, complained:
"Somebody's got to stand up and say, What are you doing? This to me is like, come on, you're not serious. This is 2011."

2011 NY Times article



Published Perspective

*Head and facial injuries resulting from stick-to-body contact represent an opportunity for intervention. Most game head and facial injuries associated with stick contact indicate the limitation of the “bubble rule” (prohibiting placing a stick within 7 inches of an opponent’s head). Even if the vast majority of injuries were unintentional, **permissive forms of helmets and facemasks may provide a more effective response compared with relying on players and officials to self monitor the location and use of their sticks relative to other player’s heads and faces.** In addition, the path of the ball, either directly or when deflected, does not recognize the imaginary bubble.*

Commentary JAT 2007



FARES AS
LOW AS
\$39*

NOT ON ORBITZ OR EXPEDIA.
ALWAYS ON AA.COM.

Book Now

*Each way based on round trip. Taxes and conditions apply.

A Case Against Helmets in Lacrosse



Larry French

Helmets, except for goalkeepers, are banned in women's lacrosse. "This to me is like, come on, you're not serious," Dr. Jack Ryan said. "This is 2011."

By ALAN SCHWARZ

Published: February 16, 2011

The Case for Helmets

- Helmets (hard or soft) that support a face mask almost eliminate the risk of oral, nasal, facial injuries, and possible concussion severity, particularly from inadvertent stick and ball
- With rapid growth in sport, there are not enough qualified officials or coaches that understand the foundation of the way the game is played to enforce existing rules.



The Case for No Helmets

- Hematoma and skull / scalp injuries, of which hard helmets have been designed to prevent, are basically non-existent in this sport.
- Oral, nasal and facial injuries do not occur frequently based on injury surveillance data and are addressed to some extent by the eyeguards.
- The existing rules, when enforced, minimize the risk of head and face injuries
- Unintended consequences / change nature of the game
- Honor the tradition, uniqueness of the game



We need a consistent answer for...

How will the integrity of the women's game be compromised by enforcing current rules AND adding protective head and face equipment, tailored to females, that will match the current protective nature of the eye guards but enhance protection for other parts of the face and head?

