



WISCONSIN INTERSCHOLASTIC ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION

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Dear Hockey Officials, Athletic Directors and Coaches:

By now you are most likely aware a member of the Benilde-St. Margaret's boys' hockey team in Minnesota, Jack Jablonski, was injured in a junior varsity hockey game two weeks ago. The tragedy of this check from behind is that it has resulted in what looks to most likely be permanent paralysis. In that contest an inadvertent check from behind resulted in the catastrophic injury. This situation reminds all of us in the hockey community to review the key elements we have identified over the years and renew our efforts to emphasize the elimination of checking from behind in hockey and to emphasize proper contact techniques.

During the past decade the WIAA has identified checking from behind as a major point of emphasis for coaches, officials and hockey players. Following each checking from behind game disqualification penalty, the WIAA office has contacted school administrators of the penalized school. This contact has served to remind our member schools of the penalties involved along with the importance of teaching proper checking techniques, including the "hug" technique.

The slogan "It takes a village to raise a child" could never be truer. High school coaches, officials and student-athletes all have an essential and continuing role in helping to remove this type of contact from games and practices. Together, players on WIAA school teams working with high school hockey coaches and officials across the state can sustain this awareness and emphasis to ensure the game will be played within the rules which will continue to help eliminate these potentially catastrophic injuries.

With that in mind, the WIAA continues to emphasize the following:

Administrators:

- Plan regular visits to hockey practices.
- Ask to view checking/angling drills being taught.
- Make certain checking drills to separate players from the puck are not being taught.
- Make certain attacking players in drills are in control of themselves prior to making contact.
- Ask coaches about the use of the "hug" technique to grab players rather than check an opponent.

Coaches:

- Daily remind your hockey players to eliminate checking from behind.
- Prior to checking or contact drills, emphasize proper checking and contact technique.
- Before every game and every period remind your team to be aware of hitting from behind situations and to stay away from those situations.
- Be grateful when officials enforce the rules that make the game safer for all involved.

Officials:

- In your pre-game meetings with captains and coaches emphasize appropriate contact and checking.
- Prior to each period talk to the captains or coaches to again remind them of the points of emphasis.
- When there are checks from behind do not hesitate to make the call—you are protecting all of the players involved.
- Penalize players to the fullest extent of the penalty whenever a player goes head first into the boards and/or goal.

Hockey Players:

- Remember what your coaches and the officials have taught you—stay away from checking from behind situations.
- Remind each other to keep it clean and hit the brakes when you see the numbers on the back of the jersey.
- Maintain body control as you approach your opponent.
- Don't be a goon—use the "hug" technique rather than a check.

Let's prevent future checking from behind penalties and the injuries that result from taking place. With everyone involved we can prevent these injuries from occurring. Thank you for cooperation.

Sincerely,

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