

Heading: Guidelines for Technical Training and Injury Prevention

Seattle United continues to treat the safety of our players with the utmost importance and we are serious about minimizing all injuries and especially head injuries in youth soccer.

The best injury prevention is the proper implementation and delivery of fundamental technical training in practice. With regards to the challenging topic of heading in youth soccer, research suggests over 80% of all concussions that occur in youth soccer take place in games and not practices. As a result, practice modifications will only make a significant impact in the number of concussions if the technique learned in practice is carried over to games.

There are a number of studies directed at heading the ball, and the majority do not indicate that concussion occurs from intentionally and properly striking the ball with your head. In addition, there is currently no scientific evidence that heading the ball causes any type of cumulative or long-term brain injury simply from repetitive head impacts with the ball. Concussions can occur during the act of heading, but more often than not these concussions are due to head-to-head, head-to-elbow, or head-to-ground contact (and not from properly heading the ball).

In a proactive effort to teach age-appropriate heading technique and minimize concussions among our players, Seattle United will direct its coaching staff to implement the following:

1. The introduction of heading technique will take place according to US SOCCER guidelines (attached).
2. Our youngest players, U8 and U9, will receive very little heading training. Training at this age will be limited to the fundamental direction of accurate contact with the ball and keeping your eyes open. Ball velocity will be limited such as soft, underhand throws. Heading will not be encouraged in games.
3. Between the ages of U10-U12, the time spent on heading technique in training will increase, though the overall heading workload will still remain low. Training at these ages will include more advanced fundamentals: continued accuracy in contact with the ball, attacking the ball and using your arms to protect yourself during the act of heading. Ball velocity will remain low. Heading will not be encouraged in games but will also not be prohibited.
4. Beginning at age U13, the total amount of time in each training session devoted to technical training will start to decrease slightly. Heading technique will now include different types of heading (attacking vs defending, flicks, etc.). Additionally, the tactical implications of heading will now begin to permeate training sessions. Ball velocity at these ages will still include low impact throwing (serving) but will also begin to include heading from crosses and passes. Heading will be encouraged during games at these ages.

Seattle United will consider modifying our training recommendations if new science emerges, or US Soccer/FIFA suggest training and/or rule changes related to heading in youth soccer. Seattle United

remains committed to the health and safety of our players through proper training and age-appropriate implementation.