

1. ANZA Soccer

Policy on Heading the Ball

Heading the ball is an integral part of soccer at higher levels and older ages, but increasingly concerns are being raised about the dangers of brain injury from repeated heading of the ball, and from collisions that occur during attempts to head the ball. Because some parents may be worried about their children heading the ball, ANZA Soccer has developed the following policy.

Background:

1. Research into the long-term effects of repeatedly heading the ball is just beginning. The cumulative effects of low-impact and high-impact headers is simply not known.
2. Chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) has increasingly been in the news due to well-known American football (gridiron) players, boxers, and other players of high-impact sports, such as hockey being diagnosed with it (it can only be confirmed after death). A few former professional soccer players have been found to have had CTE when their brains have been studied.
3. Early studies and anecdotal evidence point to collisions and extreme numbers of headers (far more than a normal recreational player would do) possibly having some effect on players later in life. Players who frequently head long-range or very high balls also may face more risks.
4. The brains and bodies of pre-pubescent children are still developing, making them more susceptible to concussions, as well as to back and neck injuries. According to Dr. Robert Cantu, co-author of the book *Concussions and Our Kids*, children's heads are larger and "wobblier" in proportion to their bodies, making the brain more likely to shake inside the skull upon impact.
5. There is some indication that girls are more vulnerable to head and neck injuries from headers than boys, due to anatomical differences between them.
6. Younger players may not be coordinated enough to perform headers correctly, even if they intend to do so.

ANZA Soccer Headers Policy:

1. ANZA Soccer recognizes that parents are the ultimate determiners of what is safe and acceptable for their children. We encourage parents to familiarize themselves with the current research around this issue, to decide for themselves what course to follow, and to communicate this to their children.
2. Players who do not wish to head the ball (or whose parents discourage it) will not be penalized or made to feel uncomfortable by any ANZA Soccer Coach.
3. ANZA Soccer will educate its coaches about the issues surrounding headers, and will encourage them to educate players' parents as well.
4. Most younger players shy away from headers anyway; ANZA Soccer Coaches will not incorporate headers into practices or encourage them in games in the younger age groups.
5. ANZA Soccer Coaches will teach the correct method of heading the ball to players who like to attempt headers. Correct technique can help protect players from head, neck, and back injuries.
6. ANZA Soccer Coaches will begin to teach all players the correct method of heading the ball around age 10.
7. As using appropriately sized soccer balls is one way of minimizing injuries, ANZA Soccer Coaches will always use the correctly sized ball for their age group.

More Information

Here are a few articles that sum up the issues. More information can easily be found by searching the internet.

"Does Heading a Soccer Ball Cause Brain Damage?" [Scientific American](#)

With Concussion Reform at Forefront, Should Youth Headers be Nixed?" [Sports Illustrated](#)

"Ban Heading in Youth Soccer" [Boston Globe](#)

"Don't Use Your Heads, Kids" [Slate](#)

"US 'Soccer Moms' Sue Fifa Over Concussion from Headers" [The Telegraph](#)