

Report on Boats and Safety, December 2018

In NEISA we had no incidents reported on injuries received while in competition this past spring or fall seasons. It appears to be a result of much better coach and student education on head injury protocol. Proper response to eliminate the immediate possibility of re-injury and a unified consensus that coaches are not evaluators of head injuries has addressed what was in the past inconsistent responses. Led by our NEISA President Kevin Coakley, a survey was also initiated in the spring season.

After analyzing the survey data over the summer, the NEISA Head Injury Committee found the following:

- Many, but not all, well-established teams have an official team concussion policy. Very few less-established teams have an official policy.
- One in four surveyed teams did not have established return-to-play or return-to-practice procedures.
- Most teams rely on "general sailing training" to prevent concussions without specifically addressing high-risk moments.
- Multiple teams, across skill levels and sizes, appeared to display a pattern of under-reporting concussions. To address the last bullet, some teams reported significantly lower concussion incidences than teams of comparable size and sailing experience. These teams did not take any additional precautions, so the likely explanation is that student-athletes are failing to report when they are concussed. Underreporting injuries is a problem in other sports and sailing is likely no different. This is not to say that coaches are failing to appropriately report injuries. This could be the result of student-athletes not knowing the symptoms of a concussion or not wanting to sit out from practice and regattas for a recovery period.

With these findings in mind, the NEISA Head Injury Committee recommends the following to all teams in NEISA:

1. All teams should adopt their school's official concussion safety protocol. The NCAA requires that all member schools have an approved protocol, so sailing teams should adopt the policies that their institution's athletic department already developed.
2. All teams should educate their student-athletes about the signs and symptoms of a concussion.
3. All teams should stress the importance of reporting head injuries. Anyone who is hit in the head should be looked at by an athletic trainer. Failing to report an injury can lead to significant further injury and increased recovery periods.
4. All coaches should keep an open and ongoing dialogue with their teams about head injuries. Team culture is important and student-athletes should not be concerned about retribution for reporting an injury.

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