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FROM SOUTH JERSEY TO YOU

Christie signs concussion bill

By **JULIE SHANNON** • Courier-Post Staff •
December 8, 2010

New Jersey took action Tuesday to protect student-athletes from brain injuries.

Gov. Chris Christie signed into law a bill that requires coaches to remove any player who shows signs of a concussion. A doctor must clear the student before he or she is allowed to compete again.

Also, all public and private school districts in the Garden State must develop policies to handle head injuries.

Coaches and trainers in South Jersey applauded the efforts to make the treatment of concussions a priority, but many schools have already strengthened their policies on concussions.

Kevin Meder, head coach of the girls' soccer team at Lenape High School in Medford, said the district this year finalized a policy mandated by the New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association to educate athletes, coaches and parents about the risks of concussions.

Also this year, Lenape instituted the ImPACT test, in which student-athletes must take a brain test before the first day of practice. If a student suffers a concussion or displays concussionlike symptoms, he or she must take another test to see how it matches up with the first one. Once the test is normal, a doctor must clear the athlete to return to playing.

Meder said some of his players were diagnosed with concussions last season and were held out for a significant amount of time.

"It's a little frustrating for the kids, but in the ImPACT testing, they are also educated about how serious concussions are," explained Meder. "The rules are in place to protect them. They understand that concept. We stress that."

In a signing ceremony at the New Meadowlands Stadium in East Rutherford, the governor emphasized the benefit of the law.

"This is not about someone not willing to play hard in whatever sport they're in," Christie said. "This is

about protecting someone's long-term health from being overwhelmed by the sense of competition we sometimes feel in our country."

Glassboro High School adopted a policy this year in which athletes are not allowed to practice or play if they are diagnosed with a concussion and must be cleared by a doctor before they are allowed to return.

The policy was used when a concussion took out one of Glassboro's star running backs, Paul James, in a game this season.

"He was a little confused after the play, so we didn't put him back in," said head football coach Herb Neilio. "He talked to our trainer and from that he was taken to the hospital at halftime and had a brain scan."

James took an ImPACT test the following week and did not participate in that week's game. He was cleared to play the following week after he passed more tests.

"He (James) gets one brain and that's it," said Neilio. "We all like to win, but it's more important that his health is good."

Eastern High School's athletic trainer, Casey Christy, said the new law doesn't differ much from the NJSIAA's guidelines.

"The NJSIAA says that you have to have a school board-approved policy and have to educate parents, coaches and athletes about concussions," said

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Christy.

Eastern has used the ImPACT testing for the last five or six years for students playing several sports, including football, wrestling, and boys' and girls' soccer.

The ImPACT test is not required by the new state law, but Christy called it a "valuable tool because it gives you objective information."

He added: "You could lie to me and say you don't have any headaches or dizziness and you want to play; whereas, with the computer test, it measures memory and reaction time."

The Associated Press contributed to this report. Reach Julie Shannon at (856) 486-2920 or jshannon@gannett.com

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