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Concussion testing is a 'win-win' for all

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STAFF WRITER

A Ridgewood mother's concerns after her son suffered a concussion while playing lacrosse have inspired her to help organize a Baseline Concussion Testing program for Ridgewood's middle school athletes.

Christine Shippee and Nick Nicholaides, the athletic trainer at Ridgewood High School (RHS), organized the program for students in grades 6 to 8. It is also serving as a fundraiser for the RHS Sports Medicine Program.

An ImPact Baseline Concussion Test is routinely given to all Ridgewood High School athletes who participate in contact sports, Nicholaides said. Offering the same test to middle school students may be even more important, he said, because "these kids' brains are still in the developmental stage, so they may be more susceptible to having difficulties after concussions, and possibly have worse concussions, and they may take longer to heal."

The baseline test, Nicholaides said, "helps give a more definitive time in how long it will take to heal after a concussion."

The program for middle school athletes lets

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them have an ImPact Baseline Concussion Test at RHS for a \$25 fee. Coaches have been given information about the testing program, and the principals of both Ridgewood middle schools have expressed their support.

The first Baseline Concussion Testing was held last Saturday; all 70 time slots were quickly filled, Shippee said, "and my e-mail box has been swamped with requests." Because of the overwhelming response, organizers have scheduled more testing dates at RHS: Tuesday, April 13 at 7:30 p.m.; Thursday, April 15 at 7:30 p.m.; and Saturday, April 17 at 9 and 10 a.m.

"So many parents have thanked me for putting this program together," Shippee said.

To reserve an appointment for students in spring sports programs, contact Shippee at fiveshippees@aol.com. There are 28 computers available for each time slot, so reservations are mandatory and will be made on a first-come, first-serve basis. More information will be contained in a confirmation e-mail.

"After we test all the interested children participating in spring sports, we will send out another note to the fall and winter sports

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programs," Shippee said.

Shippee's son Jack suffered a concussion last spring while playing lacrosse. He was not allowed to return to practice until he retook the test and the results were back to normal, she said.

The incident, however, caused Shippee to be concerned about her son Matthew, an eighth-grader "who is a very aggressive, passionate athlete."

In middle school, she said, "the size of boys really ranges tremendously from sixth to eighth grade, and I was concerned about him playing this year because a lot of the lacrosse players are significantly bigger than he is," she said.

Shippee received permission from Nicholaides for Matthew to take the baseline test, "and while Matt was sitting in the room, I thought, 'We have this technology in town, with 28 computers that can allow 28 kids at once to take the test. This is just when we were hearing about all the budget cuts, and they keep telling us to 'think outside the box,'" she said.

"So I asked Nick if we could run a fund-raiser and offer all middle school kids this opportunity," Shippee said.

Nicholaides — who is licensed to administer the test — liked the idea, she said, and so did other RHS administrators.

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"It's a great tool in terms of making the proper decisions about when to return to play," Nicholaides said. "I've seen dozens and dozens of concussions in the past couple years."

In addition, middle school athletes do not typically have access to an athletic trainer "who can evaluate their injuries on the sideline," he said.

With the ImPact Baseline Concussion Test, "we can make sure the brain is properly functioning in a natural way," Nicholaides said. "An athlete will always tell you they can still play, but this test took the subjectivity out of it."

A baseline concussion test is a valuable tool for any athlete in a contact or collision sport, he said, including football, wrestling, soccer, lacrosse, ice hockey, and "even cheerleading, because they are doing stunting."


The test is simple: Athletes first watch a short video to learn about the signs of concussion. The test itself is taken on a computer and involves response time to various memory activities.

"It's not like a pass/fail test," Shippee said.

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"It's all based on how their brain processes information and at what rate."

Parents are also given information about concussions, Shippee said. A specialized physician will attend upcoming testing sessions to also talk to parents.

Ironically, a boy who took the baseline test last Saturday morning suffered a concussion on the playing field later that afternoon "and his mother knew the symptoms, so it's already been a success in that regard," Shippee said.

"It's a win/win situation," she said, "for the community and the RHS athletic department."

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