

SCOTTISH FA HEADING GUIDANCE

Adult Football (18+)



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In 2020, the Scottish FA introduced 'heading guidelines' for children's and youth football. This followed a University of Glasgow study (FIELD) which found an increased risk of neurodegenerative disease in retired professional footballers compared to a matched population control group, with further data analysis showing this risk was associated with career length and player position.

While the FIELD study was not designed to identify the causes of this increased risk, both head injury and heading have been suggested as possible contributing factors.

HEAD INJURY MANAGEMENT

Scotland was the first country in the world to have a single set of Concussion Guidelines for all sports. The 'If in doubt, sit them out' strapline is now widely recognised and is included in all matchday adverts at Hampden and on dressing room posters. The National Sports First Aid course aims to provide coaches and parents with the knowledge to recognise and remove players who have sustained a possible concussion, with the advanced Sport Promote course educating doctors and physiotherapists in the professional game. Concussion recognition and management is an integral part of the Scottish FA Coach Education programme.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT HEADING?

What little we know about heading and its effects on the brain largely comes from experiments trying to simulate "match heading", which suggest that there is measurable memory impairment lasting 24-48 hours following a series of headers and that brain related proteins can be detected in blood samples for a short time after heading. Brain scan changes have also been reported in footballers that may be linked to heading.

Therefore, the goal is to reduce any potential cumulative effect of heading by reducing the overall exposure to heading in training

WHAT ARE COACHES' AND PLAYERS' THOUGHTS?

The Scottish FA surveyed 50 SPFL and SWPL clubs to better understand current heading practices. A follow up survey was conducted with managers and coaches, with over 70% being supportive of heading guidelines being introduced.

In a further recent survey of players carried out in conjunction with PFA Scotland, the majority of players (64%) believed heading should be limited in training.



Of managers and coaches support the introduction of heading guidelines



Of players believe heading should be limited in training

The following guidelines are effective immediately and have been written with player welfare at the forefront.

The possible link between heading/head injury and neurodegenerative disease in football will continue to be the subject of scientific research and these guidelines will continue to be reviewed in the light of any new evidence.

GUIDELINES

1. Training exercises which could involve repeated heading should be carried out no more than once a week.
2. Training exercises which could involve repeated heading should not take place on MD-1 or MD+1; this includes activities such as crossing and finishing and set piece practice.
3. Clubs should plan and monitor heading activity in training to reduce the overall heading burden.

The Scottish FA will continue to work with clubs, coaches and players to monitor progress.

FAQs

What is meant by a 'training exercise which could involve repeated heading'?

This will cover training drills or functions which could involve repetitive heading, such as crossing and finishing, defending drills, and obviously general heading practice.

Training exercises which may result in heading, such as small-sided games, practice matches or possession boxes, are not included given the limited number of headers which occur.

We always practice set pieces on MD-1 – this will impact our match day preparations.

Set piece preparation can still take place on MD-1. Practicing of required movement and ball delivery is permitted, but the ball should not be headed. Set piece practice involving heading should take place earlier in the training week.

We use short headers during our warm-up – Player A throws the ball a couple of metres for Player B to head back to them; does that need to stop?

Provided the ball is thrown and the distance is short, this drill can continue.

Some players like to practice heading outside of training functions; is this allowed?

Individual players may decide to practice heading out with specific training exercises. Players must be made aware of this guidance and ensure any such individual exercises take place within the parameters set out. Individual activity should not take place on MD-1 or MD+1.

VIEW SCOTTISH FA HEADING GUIDANCE FOR CHILDREN'S AND YOUTH FOOTBALL AT

WWW.SCOTTISHFA.CO.UK/FOOTBALL-DEVELOPMENT/PARTICIPATION/CHILDRENS-YOUTH-FOOTBALL/HEADING/