

## **EMSA West Philosophy on Heading the Ball**

Heading is not a skill taught or encouraged in our community program for children under 13 years of age. The opportunities to head the ball effectively (comparing to other ways of contacting the ball) is minimal for this age group, although we recognize that it may happen from time to time in a game. By not making this a part of our youth development practices, we are reducing the chance for head and neck injuries.

The facts are as follows:

- Concussions occur in contact sports
- Repetitive concussions accumulate more serious risks to the athlete
- Concussion and sub-concussive symptoms may not be visible immediately after an incident
- Injuries to the brain can occur from sudden jarring impacts to areas other than the head
- Children are still growing and generally not as strong as adults in their neck and shoulders

We recognize that more injuries to the head occur from contact with other players or the field surface. By recommending no heading of the ball for soccer players under 13 years of age, we are only minimizing one of the potential ways in which concussions can occur.

- The Canadian Pediatric society has put out a warning against heading in youth soccer.
- Canadian researchers in the Journal of Brain Injury cited numerous studies that indicated that players who frequently headed the ball had lower scores on memory, motor skills, and conceptual thinking than players who headed less often or athletes from non-contact sports.
- Albert Einstein college of Medicine study found amateur players who frequently headed the ball had poorer memories, consistent with finding for patients with traumatic brain injury.
- Research at the University of Texas Medical School found a correlation between heading, as well as years player, to slower cognitive functions in high school players.
- November 2015- US YOUTH SOCCER BANS HEADING in youth soccer.

EMSA West coaches focus on teaching players in U4 to U12 soccer skills, other than heading, which allow the player to control movement of the ball more efficiently. Many ways to pass, dribble and shoot are learned and these skills require endless practice to master as individuals and as a team. At this age considering the player's safety, training is better spent working on maneuvering the ball without the use of heading. Heading will be introduced at the U14 level by the coaching staff following safe technique drills and skills.

During a U4 to U12 soccer game, if the ball does contact a players head, the referee will not stop the play. The play continues uninterrupted.

Since the safety of our players is of the most importance, we can lessen the chance of injury by encouraging no heading for players under the age of 13 years.