August 17, 2017

Dear Parents,

Regardless of prior experience or ability, participation in Athletics is a part of the EHS experience for every Episcopal student. As an athletic department, we pride ourselves in promoting the importance of the physical, mental, moral, and emotional well being of each student as central to the experience of an EHS athlete.

At the core of our mission is the utmost concern for the health and safety of each individual athlete as he or she steps onto the field or court for each workout, practice session, or competition. At the forefront of our work in this area is the prevention and treatment of concussions, a subject that has received widespread and frequent media attention this summer.

Whether it be coverage of emerging research done with a specific focus on youth sports or investigations of the long-term effects of head injuries sustained by professional athletes, the attention given to the topic of concussions has helped to encourage awareness and vigilance at the high school level throughout the country. At EHS we are constantly working to ensure that our students benefit from the highest standards of care when it comes to concussion management. Under the direction of our Medical Director, our two full-time athletic trainers work cooperatively with the health center staff to annually review and evaluate our education, testing, evaluation, and treatment systems with the goal of implementing the most efficient and effective protocols.

Central to the promotion of an athletic program that holds health and safety as its most important tenant is education. At EHS, every coach is required to complete an online course on concussions in sport developed by the National Federation of State High School Associations on an annual basis. This course is specifically oriented to coaches that work at the high school level and is designed to both educate coaches on the dangers of concussions and reinforce the importance of their role as the first line of defense in recognizing the symptoms of a potential brain injury sustained during practice or competition. We also work to educate students about the symptoms of concussions. Our goal as a department is to create a culture where students feel supported and empowered to recognize potential symptoms of a concussion in either themselves or a teammate and report these to a coach or athletic trainer.
As athletic administrators, we also carefully follow the guidelines set forth by the national governing bodies for each sport when it comes to properly equipping each athlete for the specific type of activity that he or she is involved in. As one of very few high schools with an Assistant Athletic Director whose specific focus is on Equipment and Facilities, we are able to not only issue top-of-the-line protective equipment for our athletes, we are able to ensure that this equipment is fitted, reconditioned, and cared for with an exceptional level of professionalism. Similarly, we actively push our coaches to pursue professional development opportunities specific to their sport that promote the type of proper skill instruction that aids in injury prevention.

In a residential environment, we are uniquely positioned to provide comprehensive care for any student with either a suspected or diagnosed head injury. Should a student be suspected of sustaining a concussion during athletic activity, he or she is always immediately removed from play and fully evaluated by an athletic trainer on the sidelines. A student with any symptoms consistent with a concussion will remain removed from activity and cared for under the direction of one of our athletic trainers. Our athletic trainers work together with an on-campus team that includes the student, his or her coach and advisor, his or her dorm team, and members of the health center staff to provide the appropriate care and supervision after a suspected head injury.

At EHS, every student begins each academic year by establishing neurocognitive baseline values using the computer-based ImPACT (Immediate Post-Concussion Assessment and Cognitive Testing) test. ImPACT is the most widely used and most scientifically validated computerized concussion evaluation system. If an athlete sustains a head injury, our athletic trainers will re-test that student to help quantitatively measure the symptoms and compare them with the initial benchmark testing. This information, in addition to self-reported or observed symptoms, helps the EHS healthcare team and school administration to establish the best individualized action plan for a student’s guided recovery.

Episcopal’s return-to-play program follows the National Athletic Trainers’ Association’s (NATA) guidelines. These guidelines include a 5-day program where the gradual increase of physical activity is designed to position an athlete to return to practice and competition without the relapse of symptoms. A return-to-play action plan is always coupled with a return-to-learn program that outlines a specific set of restrictions regarding cognitive activity both during and after the academic day. These restrictions are set relative to the severity of a student’s injury and include considerations such as limits to screen time or reading time, homework assignments, and/or assessments. Expectations are also set for a student’s activity when it comes to dorm life, social life, and travel off-campus. As a student recovers from his or her injury, these restrictions are gradually lifted. The athletic trainer assigned to manage each individual concussion works with the Academic Dean to inform a student’s advisor, teachers, coaches, and dorm team of his or her progress. When appropriate, this team may also include the Director of Academic Support and/or one of our school counselors.

As the academic year approaches and we prepare to open up our 2017-2018 athletic campaign, we hope that you won’t hesitate to reach out to us, or a member of our healthcare team, if you have any questions
or concerns regarding these programs. We look forward to welcoming you back to campus in the coming weeks.

Best,

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