

NFL Taps UNH's Swartz to Advise on Head, Neck, Spine Injuries

Tuesday, February 28, 2012

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ERIK SWARTZ, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF KINESIOLOGY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAMPSHIRE, WAS RECENTLY APPOINTED TO THE NFL'S HEAD, NECK AND SPINE COMMITTEE.

The week after the Super Bowl, when many New England football fans were licking their wounds, Erik Swartz was advising the National Football League on treating wounded players. Swartz, an associate professor of athletic training in the department of kinesiology and an expert on cervical spine injuries in contact sports like football, recently joined the NFL's Head, Neck and Spine Committee, one of several health and safety committees that advise NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell.

Swartz's appointment, which is to the subcommittee on safety equipment, puts him at the flashpoint of player safety: concussions and head injuries. "It's what everyone's chasing right now: Can helmets be improved to decrease concussions?" says Swartz.

Swartz spent two days at the NFL headquarters in New York City earlier this month working with a team of neurologists, athletic trainers, engineers and others. The charge of his subcommittee, says Swartz, is to review new and developing equipment for football players, including helmets, shoulder pads, collars, and mouth guards. "We want to determine not only if the equipment is doing what it's supposed to, but also if it's safe," he says.

Swartz brings to the NFL a decade of research into the prevention and management of cervical spine injuries in athletes. He has published several studies that explore the safe removal of protective equipment like helmets and shoulder pads from athletes who sustain cervical spine or head injuries during play. During the meetings at the NFL, he presented on current research he is conducting on a new design of shoulder pads that quick-release for easy removal from an injured player.

"That research is really valuable to them, so they can inform teams about new equipment designs," he says.

Swartz calls his appointment to this NFL committee humbling. "It validates the importance of the research I've been doing here at UNH, and it confirms that I've been doing it well," he says, adding, "The NFL has definitely been taking the issue of head and neck injuries very seriously."

[Watch a video of Swartz's research in action.](#)

Photo by [Jeremy Mayhew](#), College of Health and Human Services

- WRITTEN BY:

[Beth Potier](#) | Communications and Public Affairs | beth.potier@unh.edu | 2-1566



University of New Hampshire

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