

Spear tackler's spine

Rule changes in 1976 banned spearing (the practice of using the football helmet as a battering ram to tackle an opponent) and resulted in a reduction of the number of football-related occurrences of cervical spine fractures and quadriplegia ¹⁾.

Four characteristics of spear tackler's spine:

1. [cervical spinal stenosis](#)
2. loss of normal cervical lordosis: as a result, the stress of axial loading is more likely to be imparted to the vertebral bodies, rather than being absorbed by the cervical musculature and ligaments, increasing the risk of burst fractures and quadriplegia
3. evidence of pre-existing traumatic abnormalities
4. documented spear tackler's technique

Suggested management

The athlete is removed from competition until the cervical lordosis returns and the player learns to use other tackling techniques. This tackling technique has been banned since 1976.

¹⁾

Cantu RC, Mueller FO. Catastrophic Spine Injuries in Football. J Spinal Disord. 1990; 3:227-231

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