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**Dr. S. Robert Contiguglia- President  
U.S. Soccer Federation  
1801 S. Prairie Ave.  
Chicago, IL 60616**

Dear Sir,

The recent USSF statement on head injuries in soccer and padded headgear contains misleading statements. The biggest losers from such a statement from otherwise responsible organizations will be the players.

There are very few facts in the statement; rather there are a number of opinions, most of which I believe do not represent the opinions of the majority of the medical community.

In contrast, I would like to point out a few facts that we can all agree upon. First, it is a fact that concussions occur in soccer, and that concussions have negative medical consequences. It is agreed upon by everyone that concussions should be avoided if possible; that is, that the risk of concussion should be minimized in soccer, if possible. Although not agreed upon, there is also substantial evidence that there are long-term neuro-cognitive effects of severe or repeated minor concussions, including in soccer players.

Other facts that relate to concussion and head padding in soccer include the fact that the likelihood of concussion correlates directly with the degree and nature of the acceleration/deceleration force. It is also a well-established fact from in-laboratory testing that padded headgear reduces these forces. Therefore, it is an inescapable but as yet unproven conclusion that padded headgear in soccer will reduce concussions. This is a worthy goal to pursue, while at the same time preserving the current method and techniques that make soccer what it is.

Unfortunately, the USSF statement ignores these facts. I agree with the statement, however, that there is "no evidence that wearing this sort of headgear is beneficial to players." This is a fact only because the proper studies have not yet been done. Such studies are being planned, and we should await their results before making negative comments on such a noble goal as protecting the brain from injury.

There are several specific points in the statement that deserve comment. As already mentioned above, the force of the impact is critical to concussion production, modulated

by the nature of the impact. Also, hard helmets in hockey and football are designed to prevent catastrophic injury, not concussion, although there is evidence that they do in fact decrease concussion from certain types of blows. Your statement that "padded headgear designed to decrease impact will not reduce the prevalence of these types of concussions" lacks foundation and is irrelevant to soccer.

A particular misleading and unnecessarily frightening point of your statement is to suggest that "players may develop a false sense of security, play more aggressively, and not learn proper technique—thus potentially increasing the frequency of concussions." This is speculation, and is clearly biased for some unknown reason.

The suggestion that headgear might affect decisions regarding return to play goes against your own position, and the position of the medical community, that concussions should be recognized and players treated in accord with current return to play guidelines. Put another way, the return to play decision has nothing to do with headgear.

Lastly, the fact that USSF recommends that headgear be allowed should be commended. The addition of the phrase "if it is not dangerous to the player or other players" is unnecessary and clearly demonstrates your irrational bias against protective headgear in soccer.

Because of your irresponsible statement, I feel I must now call on various medical professional organizations to issue their own statements relying upon the facts presented in paragraphs 3 and 4 above and supported by the weight of current scientific evidence. I believe these statements will support common sense measures to reduce head injury at this time, as well as to support clinical trials in the future of headgear claiming to do so.

Sincerely yours,



J. Steven Poceta, M.D.

cc:

Daniel T. Flynn- Secretary General USSF

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