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May 15, 2009

Associated Press
 Rivals High

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SEATTLE ? Zackery Lystedt's cause has become Washington law.

The state now has what advocates say is the nation's toughest law regulating when high school athletes can return to games after having sustained a concussion. The legislation signed Thursday in Olympia by Gov. Chris Gregoire prohibits athletes under 18, who are suspected of sustaining a concussion, from returning to play without a licensed health care provider's written approval.

It is named after a 16-year-old in Maple Valley who suffered a life-threatening brain injury in 2006 after he returned to play football following a concussion.

"It's the first of its kind in the country which mandates that youth athletes who sustain a concussion cannot come back to play without the written consent of a doctor or provider," said Rep. Jay Rodne, R-North Bend, whom Lystedt's family contacted for help.

"When in doubt, the player has to come out."

The law also requires each of the state's school districts to work with the Washington Interscholastic Activities Association to develop a standard for educating coaches, players and parents on the dangers of concussions and head injuries. A concussion and head injury information sheet must be signed by the athletes and their parents or guardians.

More than 3.5 million sports-related concussions occur each year in the United States, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Brain Injury Association of Washington. The bill's authors said they found many head injuries in community youth sports occur in girls' soccer.

The Brain Injury Association, the CDC and the NFL's Seattle Seahawks are partnering on an education program for concussion awareness in Washington. That effort has included the distribution of youth league coach clipboards that have information on head injuries and concussions on the back.

Other states, such as neighboring Oregon, have proposed or established laws mandating annual concussion training for coaches in youth sports.

Washington's law takes that effort a step further by including that training, then regulating the return of players who have sustained a head injury.

Victor Lystedt, Zackery's father, sought his state representative's help after his son sustained a concussion while making a tackle in a middle-school game on Oct. 12, 2006. After sitting out for a while, Zackery returned in the fourth quarter. He collapsed after the game and had to have two emergency brain surgeries.

He remains dependent on a wheelchair and on around-the-clock care. He and his father testified in Olympia during a hearing on the bill a few months ago.

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