



Player Feels Guilty About Injured Opponent

This resource stems from a question submitted to the Ask PCA blog. Responses come from our experts including PCA Trainers, who lead live group workshops for coaches, parents, administrators and student-athletes.

“One of the youth football players I coach cleanly tackled an opponent, who suffered a broken collarbone on the play. Everyone shook hands just fine after the game, but now my player feels guilty and unsure he wants to keep playing. Any advice on how I can bring my player back around?”

PCA Response by Mike Farley, PCA Trainer–Milwaukee

First of all, I’m glad that the game ended with shaking hands and that everyone involved understood that injuries can occur in any game. However, for this young player, having the knowledge that his hit may have helped cause this injury can be very upsetting.

It will help him to consider all of the factors that might have led to this injury, and to re-consider whether his play was the cause.

- Bones don’t typically break from the force, but from an awkward fall or position of the body.
- The injured player might have been in a poor position to take the blow.
- This bone may have been on the verge of breaking and your player’s tackle was just the final straw.

Share these ideas with your player, so he doesn’t start feeling – like the comic character The Incredible Hulk – that he’s dangerous or not to be trusted with others. I doubt your player will ever break another athlete’s bone. It’s pretty rare.

Also, make sure your players tackle properly – getting to the hole quickly, squaring up on an opponent, delivering a heads-up tackle and wrapping up with the arms. Far too many young players follow poor examples by NFL defenders who use a “bash” technique that can deliver a monster hit, but often results in a missed tackle – or worse yet, a concussion or other injury.

Let your player know that if he no longer finds football fun, that’s a good reason to jump to another sport, but not because he was part of a single freak play. (Remember an injury can happen any sport; just ask any set of siblings playing in their own backyards, who, last I checked, are not deterred from picking on each other from time to time!)

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Player Feels Guilty About Injured Opponent, continued

I hope this encourages you and your player to continue striving for your best and to enjoy, what I think is not only "America's game", but America's best game.

PCA Trainer Mike Farley is a former pro football player and longtime youth sports coach.

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