

Soccer

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Maine Principals' Association's red card ejection rule, and if applicable, those penalties would be added to the cumulative-card consequences.

"Let's say a person gets their fourth card of the season and it's a red card," said Raymond. "They would have to sit out the rest of that game and the next game, and then the three games above that."

Exceptions to the Maine Principals' Association rule involve indirect yellow cards assessed to a coach for an illegal equipment violation, which will not count toward the cumulative total. Any card given to an athlete for such a violation, which occurs after the first card has been given to the coach, will count toward that player's total.

Cards issued during the preseason will not count toward the cumulative total, though any athlete or coach who receives three yellow

cards or one red card during preseason will be suspended for the remainder of the preseason as well as the first regular-season contest.

The SMAA example

If the Southwestern Maine Activities Association's experience with a cumulative-card policy is any indication, the state could see a significant reduction in cards issued to players and coaches.

"What we have found is that number of cards issued certainly has declined in our league since we started this in 2000," said Stevens, who tracks the number of cards assessed to soccer players and coaches in the 16-school league each year.

"The other thing we've found out is that fewer and fewer people now have to serve consequences because of cards," he said.

According to Stevens' data, the number of cards issued since 2000 during regular-season Southwestern Maine Activities Association boys matches has ranged from 123 at the varsity and subvarsity levels

in 2002 to a low of 36 in 2014.

That number has topped 100 just once since 2004 — it was at least 105 each year from 2000 through 2002 — and totaled 58 last fall.

The annual average for cards issued during boys matches since the policy was implemented 16 years ago is 80.69 — 63.13 for varsity players, 12.56 for subvarsity players and five for coaches.

For girls matches, the post-2000 regular-season high for a year was 23 in 2008 while the low was five in 2009. Twenty-one cards were issued to Southwestern Maine Activities Association girls players last season.

The annual averages for girls since the Southwestern Maine Activities Association's cumulative-card policy was implemented are 10.94 for varsity players, 1.50 for subvarsity players and 2.75 for coaches.

"On the girls side we have very few cards to begin with," Stevens said. "Our girls' card total is extremely low, and it is very unusual

to have a girl get more than one card in a year."

Since 2007, only two Southwestern Maine Activities Association girls soccer players have drawn as many as three cards during any regular season while only two other girls have received two cards in a season.

Just one Southwestern Maine Activities Association boys player has been assessed the maximum five cards in any year from 2007 through 2015 and been subject to suspension for the remainder of the regular season.

One other boys player amassed four cards in a year during that span, while 15 players have drawn three cards and 48 have been assessed two cards during a regular season.

"I can recall since we've done this only one person who got to that fifth card," said Stevens. "To me that's a pretty good sign."

Just two Southwestern Maine Activities Association boys soccer coaches and three girls coaches — all male — have received as

many as two cards during a season over the last nine years.

"It certainly is different now," said Stevens, "and the quality of our play is better now, too. Hand in hand with our policy, the games in the [Southwestern Maine Activities Association] are played much differently now because the skill level is so much better."

A self-policing plan

One key to the new Maine Principals' Association policy involves the central reporting system that keeps track of yellow and red cards issued around the state.

Game officials currently report all cards assessed during any high school match to the Maine Association of Soccer Officials website, and an email notification then is automatically generated and sent to the player's or coach's school.

"We know as soon as the official inputs a card into the system that a player has received it, and then it becomes the responsibility of

the school to oversee it and make sure we're not playing with ineligible players," Raymond said.

"It is completely the responsibility of the school to keep track of how many cards a player or a coach has had," he added.

Raymond said the officials' organization has been very supportive during the development of the policy, and that implementation will be a collective effort.

"It's not really to put all the ownership on the kids, it also puts responsibility on the coach and the school," he said. "We at Hampden Academy, for example, are certainly going to be looking at that as well to make sure our kids are abiding by the rule."

"If we have a kid who gets close to it we'll certainly have a conversation, even though we already have a conversation after one [card]," he said. "We're going to have to keep a closer eye on it as a school, but this just brings everyone together so we're all responsible for how the kids behave and how they act."

NASCAR

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says, it feeds into the egos of the drivers.

"Man, they are way harder to drive," Earnhardt told the NASCAR Wire Service. "This seems weird to me, but it's what you want. I don't know if that makes sense to someone who's not a race car driver, but you want it to be hard, because all the guys in the garage think they're the best driver in the garage. And the harder we can make it, the better shot each one of them thinks they've got at winning, right?"

"So all of us are like, 'Make it harder; make it harder, because that helps me.' That's pretty much the mentality in there. And so, I think you see in my conversations with the fans a little bit, they're seeing the cars move around. That's something they hadn't seen in a while. They're seeing the drivers wrestle with the

cars a little more, which is important, to having a more exciting product.

"And if they can figure out a way to capture more of that, particularly with the television audience, I think we will be going in the right direction. But, yeah, the cars are way slicker, they're harder to drive, they slide around on top of the track whereas in the past, they felt forced into the track and felt much more comfortable."

Another contributing factor is the job Goodyear has done in matching tires chosen for particular tracks with the lower-downforce rules package. Drivers and crew chiefs have long advocated for greater fall-off throughout a fuel run, and the racing this year has enhanced that aspect of competition.

The new package also has reduced the effect of "aero-push," which in the past inhibited drivers' ability to approach and pass a slightly slower car.

"I think the biggest thing I've noticed is just the abil-

ity to race well in traffic, the ability to run fast behind a car," Truex said. "If you run a guy down, you don't hit that wall (of air) three or four cars back and just can't go as fast as you were going before. It gives you a lot more options in traffic, a lot more passing going on."

"A few years ago, when we had a really lot of downforce, when they dropped the green flag for the race and if you were mid-pack, you were out of control and you couldn't go anywhere, and I've seen a lot less of that. Obviously, the tires are a big, big part of what we're doing with the low downforce with the tires wearing out and the car slowing down as the run goes on. It's really opened up a lot of opportunities."

Tire management, too, has become a much more important issue, because the lower downforce has given Goodyear the latitude to bring generally softer compounds to the track.

"We've seen some of the

races where guys that maybe aren't some of the fastest cars or don't have really good speed throughout the weekend all the sudden 15, 20 laps in a run, they start coming to the front because their cars handle well," Truex said. "So it's just given guys a lot more opportunities to pass and to make the racing exciting."

"I feel like it's been a lot more fun to drive the cars. It's been a lot more fun to race with people, moving around, finding new grooves, and I thought 'Just look at what we saw at Richmond.' That was the first time in years that we've run anywhere except for the bottom, you know?"

"We ran all over the track and that's just highly unlikely for Richmond typically, so I think it's been really good. I feel like the races have been exciting and a lot more fun than past years, and I think they will just continue to get better as we take downforce off and make the tires softer yet."

Fighters

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there is no way to eliminate the risk of concussion."

He said he expected information learned from his study to be applied to make other contact sports safer too.

Chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) has also left its mark on American Football, and for several years the National Football League has wrestled with the problem of how to compensate former players who have the neurological condition, which seems to manifest itself differently in them.

"There are definite differences between sports, likely to be related to the mechanics of the head impact," Bernick said. "Fighters are more likely than football players to have slurred speech, or coordination problems."

"However, there are also some common fea-

tures such as memory impairment, mood and behavioral changes."

Bernick said the study has identified certain areas of the brain that seem more vulnerable to injury and developed an iPad-based test to quickly assess brain performance over time, which the Nevada State Athletic Commission is to make mandatory for fighters later this year.

"We have also developed a 'Fight Exposure Score' based on the number of fights, fights per year, age, education, and the number of times a fighter has been knocked out which can predict who is a higher risk of having cognitive impairment," Bernick added.

Last week the medic took his research to Washington where Senator John McCain expressed support.

"We must make sure that the young men and women who engage in these sports are not going to put their lives and futures in jeopardy," McCain told a media conference.



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