



Statement on helmet covers

IFAF Rules Committee

Rule supplement 2025-01, 16th March 2025

1 What is the issue?

A number of questions have been raised about whether it is legal for a player to wear a helmet cover during a game. Helmet covers are promoted as a means to reduce the risk of head injury (e.g. concussion).

2 What is the IFAF rule?

This discussion is about IFAF rules, but also applies to national and competition-specific rules based on IFAF rules.

IFAF rules do not state anything explicitly about helmet covers, but our position can be inferred from the existing rules and from a statement made by the National Operating Committee on Standards for Athletic Equipment (NOCSAE), an organisation referred to in our rules.

Rule 1-4-4-a-3 (<http://www.myiafoa.org/rules/ifaf2025/1.html#LABEL1-4-4>) states, "Helmets must carry a warning label regarding the risk of injury and a manufacturer's or reconditioner's certification indicating satisfaction of National Operating Committee on Standards for Athletic Equipment (NOCSAE) test standards. Reconditioned helmets shall show recertification to indicate satisfaction with the NOCSAE test standard."

3 What are the NOCSAE implications for helmet covers?

NOCSAE issued a statement in 2024 about "add-on helmet products" (<https://nocsae.org/certification-to-nocsae-standards-and-add-on-helmet-products-2/>). Their position is that the addition of an add-on product (such as a helmet cover) to an already-certified model of helmet changes the helmet and creates a new untested model. This new model (helmet plus cover) is no longer identical to the one originally certified.

The manufacturer then has the right to declare the original helmet certification as void and, if they wish, obtain a new certification of the combined helmet plus cover product. Alternatively, the add-on manufacturer could obtain certification of the helmet plus cover model; but would then assume liability for this combined product.

It has been said that all helmets that are more than a year old lose their NOCSAE certification unless they are reconditioned by an approved reconditioner. We do not believe this is the case.

At <https://nocsae.org/general-recertification-requirements-and-recommendations/>, NOCSAE state that "Recertification is not a requirement under NOCSAE standards, although it is strongly recommended."

Manufacturers of helmets often stipulate a 1-year warranty period for their product, but a warranty is not the same as a NOCSAE certification.

4 What are the implications for IFAF players?

To the best of our knowledge, no helmet or add-on manufacturer has obtained certification for any combination of helmet and cover. Adding a cover to a helmet therefore risks voiding the NOCSAE certification of the helmet.

(A list of NOCSAE certifications made by the Safety Equipment Institute (SEI) can be found at <https://www.seinet.org/search.htm>.)

Consequently, it is currently effectively illegal to wear a helmet cover in an IFAF game, but this situation may change in the future as new certifications to NOCSAE standards are made.

Note also that, since Rule 1-4-4-a-2 states, "Helmets for all players of a team must be of the same colour and design", if one player wears a certified helmet/cover combination, then all players must do so. (Some national federations or competitions may have made that rule a recommendation rather than mandatory, so that might allow some but not all players to wear a cover in domestic football.)

5 Can a helmet cover be used during practice?

IFAF playing rules only cover game situations. In a practice situation, safety is a coaching responsibility, and it is therefore a coaching decision as to whether players can wear a helmet cover or not.

6 What is the situation in other levels of football?

IFAF's position is similar to NCAA's position - a player in college football can only wear a helmet that carries NOCSAE certification. This was reiterated by the NCAA Secretary-Rules Editor before their 2024 season and has not been over-ridden at their 2025 rules committee meeting.

We understand that in US high school football, the decision has been delegated down to state level.