



AMALIE Arena Media Clips
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1. Will NHL mandate neck guards following fatal skate blade injury? – Eduardo Encina (Tampa Bay Times)

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TAMPA — The death of former NHL player Adam Johnson from a horrific skate blade injury this past weekend has triggered renewed conversation around whether neck protection should be more widely mandated.

It's a discussion that's not easily resolved, but on Tuesday the NHL took a step toward league-wide neck guard use.

In an interview with SiriusXM Radio NHL Network Radio, NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly said commissioner Gary Bettman has been in contact with players union chief Marty Walsh to get the use of neck guards "on the radar," and the league is now strongly recommending that players wear neck guards.

The difference between recommending neck guards and requiring them is vast, and few NHL players use them, though many were required in the youth and junior ranks.

Lightning captain Steven Stamkos on Monday called the Johnson accident "unfortunate" but said there hadn't been discussion among players in the locker room about beginning to wear neck protection. No players wore such protection for the team's game Monday against the Seattle Kraken.

"I mean, listen, it's a freak accident," Stamkos said. "And it's terrible and unfortunate and sad. It's just crazy that that happened in the sport that we play, that we love and have so much fun doing. But it's just a freak thing."

There are many options for Lightning players to protect their necks, from traditional neck guards to base-layer turtlenecks, and the technology for cut-resistant fabric is always improving.

But head equipment manager Colten Wilson said there's been far less research and testing done on neck guards than cut-resistant equipment that protects players' arms and legs. Some of those products are infused with Kevlar, but every year more cut-resistant fabrics are being developed that are more durable and washable.

Every year, the league does testing of cut-resistant material and sets grades to its effectiveness. "Honestly, it's not something that I'm not sure if it's been tested or not," Wilson said.

"In the NHL, they definitely test base layers for arms and legs. There are different shirts and pants and shorts that are tested, and then there's wristbands and sleeves and socks and stuff. But like, on our chart nothing specifies the neck that I'm aware of.

"The day after (Johnson's death), I had a couple guys come up with comments, 'Hey are neck guards going to be mandatory now?'" Wilson continued. "Other than that, no one has asked for anything."

Johnson's fatal injury occurred while he was playing for the Nottingham Panthers against the Sheffield Steelers in a Champions Cup game Saturday in England's Elite Ice Hockey League. His neck was cut by the skate of Matt Petgrave as Petgrave's skates went high in the air after he made contact with another player just inside the blue line.

The English Ice Hockey Association, which governs the sport below the Elite League, mandated neck guards at all levels to begin in 2024.

Minor hockey in Canada mandates neck guards, as do the major junior hockey leagues in Ontario (OHL) and Quebec (QMJHL). But USA Hockey only recommends the use of neck guards, citing “sparse data on neck laceration prevalence, severity and neck laceration protector effectiveness.” Without the enforcement of USA Hockey, American college, junior and youth leagues are on their own in mandating the protection.

It took time for NHL players to buy in on other cut-resistant gear, no different to the eventual implementation of helmets and visors. The players union campaigns for giving players freedom in what equipment they wear, and players are particular about how equipment feels, especially if they deem it might be restrictive. But the league has yet to mandate cut-resistant fabric.

“We have really been pushing hard for cut-resistant materials and guards for use by our players,” Daly told NHL Network Radio. “It is an adjustment for them ... Obviously, the most recent horrific accident really will step up the neck guards, for sure.”

Since November’s skate blade incident involving Edmonton’s Evander Kane — then-Lightning forward Pat Maroon’s blade unintentionally gashed Kane’s wrist — Wilson said about 90% of Lightning players now wear some sort of cut-resistant fabric protection. Before the season, the entire training camp roster watched a video from the league that emphasized the importance of cut-resistant fabric, he said.

“After that video, there were a lot of guys coming up to me and said, ‘Hey, I saw this shirt on this video. Is that something I can try?’” Wilson said. “We have a guy that’s using a shirt now that is cut-resistant throughout his arms. So, that’s definitely a positive. We have way more guys wearing wrist sleeves now.

“We have a guy, he wears cut-resistant socks and he has a sleeve that goes over his shin guard and then he has our game socks that have cut-resistant material in the back of them, so he’s kind of triple-layered. But it’s definitely taken off. There are probably more guys wearing wrist guards than there are not now.”