

# Communications Support

# Communications Overview

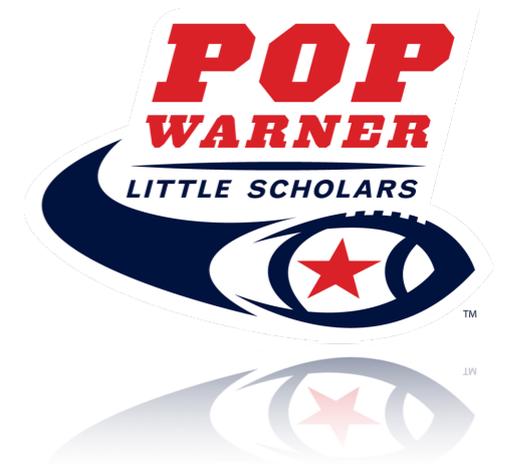


Our core mission is enabling young people to benefit from participation in team sports and activities in a safe and structured environment. As we continue to fulfill that mission we must also help educate the public about the facts around head injuries and how today's version of Pop Warner is a model for making youth football a safer and better experience than ever.

Some advocates and media reports have generated confusion and fear about youth football. Although research connecting football to long term brain injury is inconclusive and lacking scientific consensus, some are calling for the abolishment of youth tackle football because they believe it is the only way to keep kids safe. Proposed legislation in several states would ban the sport for children under 13/14; some look to ban tackle before 19.

This document offers Pop Warner's perspective. Please refer to it when asked about Pop Warner's positions.

Please also remember that it's important to treat everyone on both sides of the issue with respect. We may not agree on details but we all care about kids and should aim to have an honest, civil discussion about a sport we believe offers so much to those who love it.



# Pop Warner on the Issues

## Questions about CTE Research

Pop Warner's independent medical advisory committee of neurosurgeons, sports medicine physicians, pediatricians and scientists has led us to implement the most stringent player safety rules in the game. Our efforts to keep kids safer are driven by objective data. While opponents point to research that claims youth football can lead to CTE, the truth is no conclusive proof exists. Many of the nation's leading medical researchers point out that there is no proven connection between youth football and CTE.<sup>(1)(2)</sup> As parents, players, coaches and administrators, we need to know more and we encourage more advanced, unbiased research into this issue.

## It's a Different Game

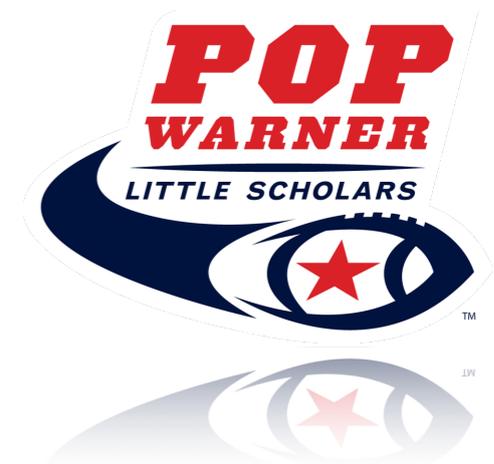
Pop Warner football is safer today than at any point in our history, thanks to mandated coaching education, greater awareness of concussions, a changing culture inside the sport and the most stringent rules in the sport. As a nation we know more today than we did 10 years ago and that has led to a safer and better version of youth football. Tackle football is a physical game with inherent risk. We are working with great partners like USA Football on approaches to complement our own efforts to make it safer.

## Legislation Banning Football

We do not agree that banning youth football is an appropriate response to concerns about player safety. Parents, not the government, should decide whether their child plays football or any other sport. For nearly 90 years millions of kids have played Pop Warner football. As adults, they point to valuable life lessons and great memories from their youth football experience. Pop Warner parents have the choice of tackle or flag football for their child. If they choose tackle they know that we have worked with our medical advisory committee and various partners to make the game safer than ever before through coaching education, stringent new rules and greater awareness around concussions.

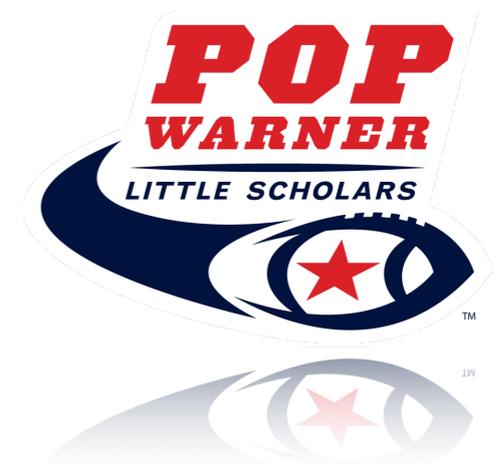
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- (1) *Does CTE call for an end to youth tackle football? Despite press about a recent study, a link between hits to the head and CTE isn't clear-cut. More data and a risk-benefit analysis are needed. <http://www.startribune.com/does-cte-call-for-an-end-to-youth-tackle-football/473655913/>*
- (2) *Dr. Julian Bailes of the NorthShore University HealthSystem Neurological Institute and CTE researcher believes there's "no scientific consensus" that 12 or 11 is a threshold age below which tackle football becomes more dangerous. <http://www.vdailypress.com/news/20180224/state-blows-whistle-on-tackle-football-bill-that-would-establish-minimum-age-to-play-draws-backlash-from-parents-and-coaches>*



# Supporting Facts: What Pop Warner is doing to make the game safer

- In 2017, our Hill Country Pop Warner League in Texas participated in a USA Football pilot program called [Rookie Tackle](#), a transitional program for kids between Flag Football and 11-player tackle and it is already generating plenty of excitement in Pop Warner. We will offer it to more Pop Warner programs next season. It is played on a smaller field with fewer players and meant to introduce the sport.
- In 2016, Pop Warner became the first national football organization to eliminate kickoffs. The ban was aimed at significantly reducing the amount of full-speed, head-on impact in games. Instead of kicking it off, the ball is placed at the 35-yard line to start each half and after each score in all Tiny Mite (5- to 7-years-old), Mitey Mite (7-9) and Junior Pee Wee (8-10) games.
- In 2016, Pop Warner also announced a further reduction of contact time in practice across all divisions. After limiting player contact to a sport-low of 33 percent of practice time in 2012, Pop Warner now restricts contact to 25 percent of practice time.
- In an effort to help change the culture and deliver an important message of safety to parents, coaches and the public, Pop Warner also produced a PSA in 2016 that started running last year on regional sports networks throughout the country, featuring actor Alec Baldwin and the head of our medical advisory committee, Dr. Julian Bailes.
- Since 2013, Pop Warner coaches are mandated to train in USA Football's Heads Up Football program, where safer approaches to tackling and blocking are taught.



# Supporting Facts: What Pop Warner is doing to make the game safer

- In 2012, Pop Warner banned full-speed head-on, blocking or tackling drills where players lined up more than 3 yards apart.
- In 2010, Pop Warner implemented the first youth sport concussion policy. Modeled after the Lystedt Law, any player suspected of having a concussion or head injury is removed from play and may not return to Pop Warner activities until he or she is evaluated – and receives written clearance – by a licensed medical professional trained in the evaluation and management of concussions.
- To ensure that Pop Warner stays on the forefront of health and safety issues and medical developments that may affect our young athletes, in 2010 Pop Warner formed an independent Medical Advisory Committee. Led by neurosurgeons, researchers and sports medicine professionals, the committee is focused on the prevention, proper identification and treatment of concussions; hydration awareness; and general health and safety issues.

