On-Field Assessment Checklist
For
Head and Neck Injuries

Primary survey

1. Establish level of consciousness:
   - Eye opening
   - Motor response
   - Verbal response

2. If athlete is unconscious, immediately assess vital signs:
   - Determine rate, depth, and rhythm of respirations
   - Determine absence or presence of pulse (rate, rhythm, strength)
   - Take blood pressure
   - Observe and control severe bleeding
   - Observe for lateralizing signs, evidence of decorticate or
decerebrate posturing
   - Evaluate pupillary reflexes
   - Observe for shock (signs and symptoms opposite those of
   intracranial hemorrhage)
   - Assume cervical spine injury until proven otherwise
   - Summon EMS if any positive signs noted
   - Reassess vital signs every 5 min

Secondary survey

1. History
   - Mechanism of injury
   - Loss of consciousness
   - Location, type, and severity of symptoms
   - Unusual sensations (tinnitus, dizziness, headache, etc.)
   - Complaints of cervical pain or any radiating symptoms into
   extremities
   - Orientation to time, person, and place
2. Observation

- Unusual body movements or behavior
- Unusual facial expressions (drooling, drooping of one eyelid or corner of mouth)
- Level of consciousness (alert, restless, lethargic)
- Pupils for size, equality, and reaction to light
- Unusual eye movements (nystagmus, cross-eye, or lateral drift)
- Otorrhea, rhinorrhea
- Swelling, deformity, bleeding, or discoloration (Battle’s sign, raccoon eyes)
- Continued monitoring of respirations, level of consciousness

3. Palpation

- Face and skull for tenderness, swelling, deformity, or depressions
- Continued monitoring of pulse rate and intensity

4. Neurological Tests

- Babinski
- Cranial nerve check (table 11.1)
- Cervical spine check
- Active ROM of all four extremities
- Grip strength and dorsiflexion strength

5. Continue to monitor vital signs every 5 min

6. Refer immediately if changes in the following:

- Level of consciousness (decrease)
- Blood pressure (increase)
- Pulse (decrease, irregular)
- Respiration (decrease, irregular)
- Pupils (unequal, dilated, unreactive)