



Protecting and Promoting the  
**Health of NFL Players:**  
Legal and Ethical Analysis and Recommendations

# Chapter 11

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## **SUMMARY:** **Equipment Managers**



This document is a summary of the full chapter on equipment managers in the Report *Protecting and Promoting the Health of NFL Players: Legal and Ethical Analysis and Recommendations*. The full chapter includes the following sections: (A) Background; (B) Current Legal Obligations; (C) Current Ethical Codes; (D) Current Practices; (E) Enforcement of Legal and Ethical Obligations; and, (F) Recommendations. Here, we provide our Recommendations, with only the minimum necessary background information. For more information and analysis of the role and responsibilities of equipment managers, including relevant citations, please see the full chapter. Also as explained in the full chapter, the NFL denied our request to interview equipment managers.

Each NFL club employs 3 to 4 equipment managers. While equipment managers assist players in a variety of ways, their principal job is to help outfit players in equipment that will maximize their safety on the field, a crucial component of player health.

Equipment managers are responsible for million dollar budgets and for ordering and constantly stocking hundreds of items players want and need in every conceivable variety, from their helmets and cleats to gum, washcloths and toothpaste. Equipment managers take pride in being responsive to the players' every need to make sure they are maximally comfortable and prepared to play. Perhaps most importantly, equipment managers help players select equipment and make sure the equipment fits according to the manufacturer's guidelines.

Equipment managers are also a critical link between equipment manufacturers and players. Equipment managers deal directly with equipment manufacturers and attend two NFL-organized seminars a year to keep up to date on the latest equipment so that they can provide the players the best available options. Players rely on the equipment managers to help prepare and protect them. Not surprisingly, players and equipment managers sometimes develop close, personal relationships during their tenures with a club.

The Athletic Equipment Managers Association (AEMA), a voluntary organization, provides certification to equipment managers working in sports across the country. The certification process requires: (1) a four-year college degree; (2) at least two years of experience working in athletics; and, (3) passing a written examination. The written examination covers management, administration, professional development, procurement, accountability, maintenance, and fitting and safety.

The AEMA has a limited role in the NFL, in part because, according to the AEMA, its limited resources prevent the AEMA from engaging with the NFL and other leagues as robustly as it would like. Approximately 60-70% of NFL equipment managers are AEMA-certified but neither the CBA nor the NFL independently requires any certification for equipment managers. Nevertheless, in recent years, the NFL has increasingly shown an interest in the AEMA's work and the importance of qualified, well-trained equipment managers.

The CBA contains no provisions specifically relevant to equipment managers or equipment. The NFL does have detailed policies on what equipment is mandatory for players, but these rules are directed at players, not equipment managers.

## Recommendations Concerning Equipment Managers

As a preliminary matter, we recommend equipment managers continue their efforts to protect player health. Interviews we conducted and news reports indicate that equipment managers work diligently and take seriously their role in providing players with equipment that will minimize the health and safety risks of playing football. Equipment managers do not appear to have any incentive to make decisions that might jeopardize player health, e.g., such as pressuring a player to play with an injury, which may affect other club employees, such as coaches or medical staff. Additionally, the twice-annual meetings for equipment managers and manufacturers seem like an appropriate way for the equipment managers to remain current and educated on the latest equipment. Minimal other recommendations are needed concerning equipment managers.

### Goal 1: To ensure that players are served by the best possible equipment managers.

#### **Recommendation 11:1-A:** The CBA should require that all equipment managers be certified by the AEMA.

As discussed above, the AEMA's certification program sets reasonable minimum education and experience requirements and requires equipment managers to pass a test certifying their competence in a variety of issues pertinent to the equipment industry, including fitting and safety. In addition, the AEMA requires its members to attend continuing education

**Recommendations Concerning Equipment Managers – continued**

courses. Requiring NFL equipment managers to be AEMA-certified is a meaningful way of ensuring that the equipment managers working with NFL players are among the most qualified and educated in the industry. The requirement is meaningful enough that it should be codified in the CBA. Ensuring highly-qualified equipment managers will help ensure that players are using the best, well-fitting and safest equipment possible.