New Rule - Deliberately Heading the Ball Updated 9/1/2016

This New Rule is not optional and is to be applied to all U11 and younger games immediately.
It does not matter how you as an individual feel about this new rule - this rule is not up to the discretion of the coaches or referees.
Although there are some rules which are frequently debated as to their 'fairness,' your opinion regarding this rule should have no consequences in its application in sanctioned matches.
Referees are expected to apply this rule to affected matches and coaches, spectators and players are expected to accept that application without debate.

The New Rule:
"When a player deliberately heads the ball in a game, an Indirect Free Kick (IFK) should be awarded to the opposing team from the spot of the offense. If the deliberate header occurs within the goal area, the Indirect Free Kick should be taken on the goal area line parallel to the goal line at the point nearest to where the infringement occurred. If a player does not deliberately head the ball, then play should continue."

Competitions:
All sanctioned leagues and competitions.

Age Level:
This rule must be applied to U11 and younger league games:
This rule does not apply to U12 and older league games.
If a 9 year-old or 10 year-old is playing in a U12 league or older league, then this rule is not applied.
It is not the referee's responsibility to track younger players or teams 'playing up.'

When Applied:
Effective Immediately - every time the ball is DELIBERATELY headed by a player in an affected match.
This is not a foul - meaning that 'deliberately heading the ball' does not need to meet the foul criteria "against an opponent."
This is a technical infringement similar to a second touch by the player taking a restart before the ball has been played by another player, (other than at a dropped ball.)

How Applied:
This rule is a significant player safety mandate.
The player deliberately heading the ball may have suffered a head injury, potentially, a long-term, quality-of-life injury.
Please be compassionate even though the restart is an indirect free kick to the opposing team.
Allow the player to be examined by the coach and allow this to be a substitution opportunity for both teams.
The focus is player safety.

New Rule - Deliberately Heading the Ball Updated 9/1/2016

Misconduct:
In general, no misconduct sanctions should be applied to deliberately heading the ball unless other options have failed.
Other options include teaching the player, asking the coach for help to teach the player.
More specifically the following misconduct situations should not be applied to deliberately heading the ball:

i. persistently infringing the Laws of the Game
ii. denying an obvious goal scoring opportunity to an opponent moving towards the player's goal by an offence punishable by a free kick or a penalty kick

Advantage:
Only if a goal is scored within 2-3 seconds of the deliberate head ball – see case studies 1 and 2 below.
The spirit of this rule is to protect young players.
Advantage should never precede player safety

Case Studies - Consider the following:
(1) A Player deliberately (but errantly) heads the ball into his/her own goal. The Referee shall allow the goal and must remind the player and the coach that he/she must not head the ball intentionally. Restart play with a Kick-off. (This is exception #1 to no Advantage.)
(2) A Player deliberately heads the ball in a defensive maneuver but the ball goes immediately to an attacker who easily kicks the ball into the goal and scores. The Referee shall allow the goal and must remind the player and the coach that he/she must not head the ball intentionally. Restart play with a Kick-off. (This is exception #2 to no Advantage.)
(3) A Player repeatedly plays the ball with his/her head deliberately. This is NOT to be considered Persistent Infringement (Misconduct). The Referee shall encourage the coach to substitute for this player who is not playing in accordance with the Rules of Competition. Restart play with an IFK.
(4) A Player denies an opponent a goal or a goal-scoring opportunity by deliberately heading the ball. This is NOT to be considered DGF (Misconduct) per the LOTG. The Referee shall encourage the coach to substitute for this player who is not playing in accordance with the Rules of Competition. Restart play with an IFK for the attacking team.

While much of what is described above will not be routinely seen at such a young age level, the Rules of Competition must account for them when they do occur.