

Clint Dempsey's dilemma – To mask or not to mask?



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SAO PAULO – [Clint Dempsey](#) has been strongly advised to wear a Kobe Bryant-style protective facemask to guard his broken nose in the United States' vital World Cup game [against Portugal on Sunday](#).

The United States captain took a fierce blow to the face during the team's [2-1 victory over Ghana](#) on Monday night and has been encouraged to use the kind of facial guard popularized by Bryant, the [Los Angeles Lakers](#) star, two years ago.

"[Dempsey] has the option of if he wants a mask on," head coach Jurgen Klinsmann said. "Broken nose or not, I'm not sure a mask can protect him, but whatever he feels good with. It will take time to heal completely, but it is part of our game unfortunately."

Dempsey was examined Tuesday after the team returned from Natal to its training base in Sao Paulo and was officially diagnosed with a nasal fracture. The 31-year-old said after Monday's game he had trouble breathing through his nose and even coughed up blood during the match after Ghana defender [John Boye](#) accidentally smashed his shin into Dempsey's face.

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Dr. Sam Rizk, a nose injury expert from Manhattan who has worked with all the major New York sports franchises, spelled out the dangers if Dempsey does not use a mask in Manaus.

"First, he needs to use a [medicated] spray to reduce the risk of bleeding and, as the fracture is still fresh, he must use a protective mask," Dr. Rizk told Yahoo Sports. "If it was reinjured it could be really bad. It could lead to severe difficulties with breathing and uncontrollable bleeding."

Dr. Kristin Egan, a private practitioner at the same Manhattan Beach medical center where Los Angeles Lakers star Bryant received treatment, insisted the decision on whether to wear the mask is a tough one for athletes.

[Video: [Belief carrying USMNT in World Cup](#)]

"It is a choice," Dr. Egan said. "I always advise athletes to wear one, but sometimes it can be uncomfortable and not everyone listens to the advice."

NBA veteran Richard Hamilton wore a mask after breaking his nose multiple times and continued to wear it during his 14-year career, and Bryant also popularized its use. He wore a clear plastic shield after breaking his nose in the 2012 All-Star Game and later auctioned it off for more than \$67,100 to aid a homeless charity.

[Photos: [U.S. players injured during opening match of World Cup](#)]

The bones in Dempsey's nasal region could take between seven to 10 days to mend, according to the doctors, meaning the [Portugal](#) game is still in the potential danger period.

A popular mask used in international soccer is one made of carbon by a Milan-based Italian company called Ortholab sport. Chelsea head coach Jose Mourinho has sent several of his players to its facility to be fitted with masks, including [Fernando Torres](#), [Ramires](#) and Petr Cech.

"We can make masks very quickly," a spokesperson for the company said. "We need a stamp [or mold] of the player's face and then it will be prepared specially for him. Even though we are in [Italy](#), we could have it with him in a few days."