

It was an average chilly night in October of 2013. I was cheering at an away football game when all of a sudden I heard a lot of commotion on the field. A player was carried off and sat down on the sideline. When I turned to see who it was, I recognized the face of my friend, Drew Williams.

Williams started seizing on the sideline, then eventually went numb. For six months he was in a coma and currently remains in a vegetative state. Williams was the star athlete in high school. He started on the varsity football team his sophomore year and also played varsity baseball during the spring. Everyone adored him and when this tragic accident happened, no one knew what to do or how to finish school without him.

### Statistics

Williams was hit and suffered from severe brain damage during his football game. Unfortunately, Williams is not the only one to receive a head injury from playing football. In 2012, 3.8 million people suffered concussions and 47% of all reported sports concussions occurred during high school football (Head Case, 2013). Additionally, the NFL just released data that shows a 58% increase in concussions during the 2015 season.

Head injuries have caused players to act erratically and potentially cause harm to themselves and/or other people. Doctors believe what causes this behavior is due to chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE). It is a progressive degenerative disease found in people who have had a severe blow to the head. CTE has been most commonly found in professional athletes participating in American football, ice hockey, professional wrestling, and other contact sports who have experienced repeated concussions or other brain trauma.

### Those affected

The NFL has had an on going concussion crisis after statistics show that many deaths of players are due to CTE. It was recently found that former Giants safety Tyler Sash, who died in September 2015 of an accidental overdose of pain medication, suffered from CTE. After returning home when his career was over, Sash displayed erratic behavior and had run-ins with the law, that included public intoxication and a four-block police chase. He suffered memory loss and other symptoms that prevented him from living a full life. After his accidental overdoes, his mother had his brain tested for CTE and according to the New York Times, the results for CTE were unusually advanced for someone his age (NFL Concussion Crisis, 2016).

To add to the NFL's crisis, a recently released movie called *Concussion*, has drawn more attention to the subject than the NFL would like. It is a biographical movie about a Nigerian forensic pathologist who fought against efforts by the National Football League to suppress his research on CTE brain damage suffered by professional football players. Several NFL players spoke out and tweeted things like, "Just watched Concussion. A great movie & a frightening reality" and "Concussion a great movie to see. A true insight to the mystery under the helmet." The NFL and its players realize that these head injuries are a serious issue and are starting to create new features to the helmet to protect the head.

### Improvements

Army Research Laboratory created a material that stretches at low speeds, but freezes up if pulled quickly. It is applied to a strap on the helmet and if the head jerks back quickly, the strap hardens and keeps the head up. Viconic, a private company that makes automotive materials, took a blast-resistant mat that it already sells to the military and can apply it to football

fields that have turf (Concussion Epidemic, 2015). With new technology developing, safer environments to play in will be provided for athletes.

### Why do we care?

Since the NFL and their players are realizing the dangers of these head injuries, the rest of the public needs to be aware. It is a serious and dangerous issue that will only grow if a stop is not put to it. While contact sports are the primary cause of concussions, other sports such as soccer, baseball, gymnastics and other non-contact sports can still cause concussions. We all know at least one person who participates in sports and we want those people to stay safe.

Kids, adults, and even retired players are all affected by serious head injuries. These are the people around you: your friends, family, and loved ones. It does not only affect those who are hit however, it affects the whole community. When something happens to a respected person, everyone around them feels their pain. That person is no longer a part of their community or their daily lives.

Williams was a very talented athlete. Due to his head injury however, his talents are now limited and he is restricted to a wheel chair. Family, friends, his school community and more were deeply affected by his incident. It is accidents like these that can and should be prevented when it comes to sports. Concussions and other head injuries start at ages as young as middle school and continue into adulthood in organizations such as the NFL. While they are attempting to improve the head injury crisis, it is still important to be aware of the dangers certain sports can cause.

## Citations

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