

Suffering From a Catastrophic Injury in the National Football League

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[Catastrophic Injury in the National Football League](#)



Football, especially the NFL, has been going through a lot of changes since we last discussed it here on the blog. The NFL got embroiled in an ongoing political debate, and many people tied that to a huge dip in its ratings, as the numbers declined steadily between 2015 and 2017. Even a Philadelphia Eagles Super Bowl victory wasn't enough to stem the tide of a dip in viewership analytics.

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Alvin F de Levie, Esq.

But obfuscated by all that kneeling during the anthem discussion was the much larger problem with football and all contact sports -- head trauma and the traumatic brain injury caused by playing tackle football from every level including high school, college, and the National Football League. American Football players are scientifically proven to be at risk for major [catastrophic injuries](#) to their head.

With all the echo chamber hot takes about the anthem embattling the NFL in the United States, the bleak fact remains that catastrophic injuries are part of the package to those who play football. Professional football players put themselves at risk of everything from memory loss to degenerative brain disease.

According to a study published in The Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA), brain damage was found in the brain tissue of all but one of the 111 brains that were donated by NFL players. The study links serious brain injuries to football. Families of the participants reported that 85% showed signs of dementia, 90% had behavioral symptoms, and 95% had cognitive symptoms.

In previous studies, severe CTE (Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy) has shown to bring on memory loss, depression, Alzheimer's disease, and dementia. Repeated blunt strikes like head tackles can cause brain damage and are collectively called CTE. Chronic traumatic encephalopathy, or CTE, is the term for brain damage that occurs after repeated blunt head impact, like head tackles in football.

It's common for NFL players to sustain mild to severe brain injuries during their football playing career. A recent personal injury lawsuit was settled between the NFL and thousands of former NFL players, where the

governing body agreed to pay a sum of \$765 million to the players because of the brain trauma they had sustained during their career. The bulk of the compensation will go towards the athletes who've sustained the most severe catastrophic injuries, and the rest will be invested in furthering research about the potential effects of brain injuries due to playing football.

These kinds of litigation aren't surprising with the kind of attention head injuries from sports have been getting in the recent times. Concussions are common football injuries that players experience from the time they suit up for their high school football team until they make it all the way to the Super Bowl. It's constantly being debated whether these seemingly large settlement amounts are enough for the injuries sustained by players and the lack of awareness of their long-term effects. Players are uninformed about the risks of developing ALS, Parkinson's and other neurological diseases due to repeated impact on the brain. The life expectancy of an NFL player is, on average, 20 years shorter than the average American male according to a published



report. Former football players are noted for having many issues from a career of impact injuries and related concussions.

The NFL came out with a directive to make sure clubs publish the fitness reports of players to help maintain integrity in the game. These reports will be available to the public, the opposing teams, and the media. There are three sections in the Injury Report. The Practice, Game Status, and the In-Game Injury report.

Practice Report: This is a fitness report card of a player during the practice sessions. It's available to other clubs and fans of the game. Apart from how much the player participated in practice sessions, any significant injuries are also available on the report, regardless of whether the player is expected to play in the next games or not. Rather than finding out through media channels and rumor mills, fans will have first-hand information about their favorite players thanks to this report.

Game Status Report: This is an availability report. Clubs are required to let everyone interested know the status of injured players who are going to play an upcoming game, even if they were part of the practice report. The status needs to be published by 4 pm EST the day before the next scheduled game.

The "probable" status has been removed in 2016. There are three categories players are listed under:

Out: Meaning they will not play the next game.

Doubtful: They are unlikely to play.

Questionable: Uncertain of being able to play.

In-Game Injury Report: These injury reports are to be provided by clubs during the game as soon as they are available. And these should be available to the broadcasters, the fans, and the media.

These should also be broadcast on the scoreboard and ribbon boards, as mandated by the NFL for the viewers at the venue. The information needs to be credible and accurate. These will go a long way in keeping everyone informed about their favorite injured stars and also make people aware of the dangers of the sport.

Head Injuries and Younger Football Players

Over the recent past, there have been a significant number of catastrophic NFL injuries and players that have been diagnosed with neurological diseases due to repetitive trauma to their brain during their career. Among other things, this can cause CTE which can quietly lead to dementia, which has no apparent signs during the footballer's career. However, doctors may

easily misjudge the symptoms of CTE and delay in a proper diagnosis.

One of the biggest consequences of the concussion and brain trauma in football players research is that fewer young people are participating in the sport.

In a recent documentary, retired star quarterback Brett Favre said he'd prefer that his grandsons play golf over football. Celebrities like former President Barack Obama, and now Justin Timberlake, have said they wouldn't let their sons play football.

National trends reflect the unease. The number of high school students playing football dropped by 25,000 in the 2016-'17 school year, despite more students than ever taking part in high school sports. (Football is still the most popular sport for high school males.)

And parents have reason to be concerned about young kids playing the sport.

A 2015 study found that former NFL players who began football before age 12 fared worse on cognitive assessments than those who started later in their teens. And this held true even controlling for the number of years played.

It suggests (though not conclusively) that playing football at ages younger than 12 is more dangerous for long-term cognitive decline than starting at an older age. "The results of this study suggest that sustaining repeated head injuries during critical periods of brain maturation could alter neurodevelopmental trajectories, leading to later-life cognitive impairment," the study concluded.

More recently, a study on the brains of deceased football players also found a link between early play and CTE. Athletes who began playing tackle football before age 12 developed the cognitive and behavioral symptoms of CTE 13 years earlier on average than those who started playing later in their teenage years.

"Every one-year younger that participants began to play football resulted in earlier reported onset of cognitive and behavioral [and] mood symptoms by approximately 2.5 years," the study concluded. However, the study did not find an increased amount of physical abnormalities in the brains of athletes who began playing earlier than age 12. Scientists are still working to figure out the exact relationship between physical brain damage, diagnosed concussions, and the start of symptoms — and are recognizing that behavior symptoms can occur without detectable physical changes.

Regardless, brain changes are a concern for younger football players. Yet another study found evidence to suggest that college football experience can lead to a decrease in the volume of the hippocampus — a critical region for memory — compared to people who never played college football.

And teenage brains can show signs of CTE, as a study of four brains from deceased teenagers who died within a few weeks of sustaining a head injury showed. A severe case, one of the brains had enough tau protein to be diagnosed with stage 1 CTE.

Again, this study doesn't suggest that CTE among teenagers is prevalent. It just shows that it is possible.

There are many uncertainties left in the research. A study of 3,000-plus Wisconsin men who had played high school football in the 1950s found no elevated rates of cognitive impairment. This shows not everyone who plays football as a teen suffers consequences, and researchers still need to better understand how much exposure to football tackles is too much for both current players and former players.

Recognizing the problems of catastrophic injuries can help. Family members who play youth football or even high school players may be experiencing health problems due to sports-related concussions. If you or someone you know has suffered a catastrophic injury, please contact the Law Offices of Alvin F. de Levie & Associates at 844-777-2529 to speak with an attorney today.

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