

Get your head out of the game



PHOTO & DESIGN BROOKE WYANT

STORY BAILEY CROCKER

The NFL has recently been embroiled in controversy over concussions. With the passing of Frank Gifford, former New York Giants football player, on August 9, the arguments have only heated up. After their deaths multiple

NFL players like Gifford have been diagnosed with CTE, or chronic traumatic encephalopathy.

This is a disease caused by concussions and has symptoms such as loss of memory and depression. But concussions don't just happen to the pros—they happen to high school and middle school athletes too.

Bench the brain?

Experts warn concussions require rigorous treatment

STORY BAILEY CROCKER

Concussion specialists keep pushing that the public stays updated about the impact of concussions on the brain and body so that they can be more aware of the dangers.

Concussions are not only caused by head-to-head collision. According to school trainer David Ortmeier, concussions can be caused by a head colliding with anything, like a knee, a sports ball or the ground.

Another trainer, Diana Lichtenstein, said there is no severity rating system for concussions.

"Even if someone has a lot of symptoms they may get over it quicker than someone who didn't have a whole lot of symptoms," Lichtenstein said.

Having a concussion means that certain activities are off limits. Because the brain needs rest, doctors recommend eliminating things that are going to stimulate the brain like technology. No physical activity is allowed because of increase of heart rate and increase of blood pressure.

Also, teachers are notified about the student's restrictions so they can help keep them caught up in school. Junior Laura Meade had concussions in both middle school and high school from soccer. In middle school, after she had gotten her first

concussion, she chose to go back and play and a few days she later hit her head again, which caused a double concussion. Though this was a hard time for her, she said that her teachers worked well with her. But she still found it hard to do school assignments.

"Whenever you get a concussion, you can't think, you're not supposed to think," Meade said. "If you think, you're not healing."

Ortmeier said that one of the biggest issues that the trainers at the school face is that doctors have different ways of managing concussions. With new understanding of the severity of concussions, the trainers also see problems with others not treating these injuries seriously enough.

According to Lichtenstein, old coaches or other people who aren't updated with the concussion rules established in May 2011 might claim the player just has a "ding."

However, Ortmeier said that coaches are aware now more than any time before about symptoms. This is why students feel more confident about speaking out about their concussions, even if it does mean missing out on a few games.

"The competitive [athletes] are ones that won't play if they recognize it's serious enough," Ortmeier said.

Though her concussions have now passed, Meade still has to deal with side effects almost every day. At the beginning of

her healing process, she would get a migraine every day but eventually they lessened. However, she still has to live with the fact that she can no longer play contact sports. To Meade, as the years have gone, she's learned to cope with it.

"The news of not being able to play soccer anymore or any contact sports was very devastating just because I wanted to continue," Meade said.

Many people believe that there is a rule that states that if an athlete has more than three concussions, they can no longer continue to play the sport. Ortmeier said that no governing body or the UIL has come out and said this is a rule. Instead, there are guidelines that are better understood by doctors about how many concussions they should allow.

According to Lichtenstein, it's still up to the doctor to recommend if the student should or shouldn't continue to play.

"It's still individual to that physician how they want to handle it," Lichtenstein said.

No one can be forced out of a sport and that is why Meade believes that it is all up to the athlete and his or her family whether they should continue to play the sport after a concussion.

"I do agree with my doctor that if you do get a concussion you should be wary of playing any more contact sports," Meade said.



Of deceased former NFL players have been diagnosed with the brain disease, CTE. The disease causes memory loss, impaired judgement and a gradual onset of dementia.

Out of **165** tested subjects that played college football **131** were positive for CTE.



STATISTICS COMPILED BY CARA CROCKER

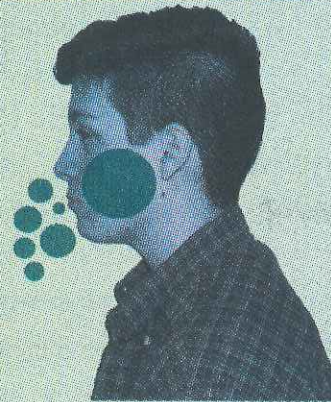
Source: Concussion Legacy Foundation

Symptoms of a concussion

PHOTOS AMANDA FINERAN



Drowsiness



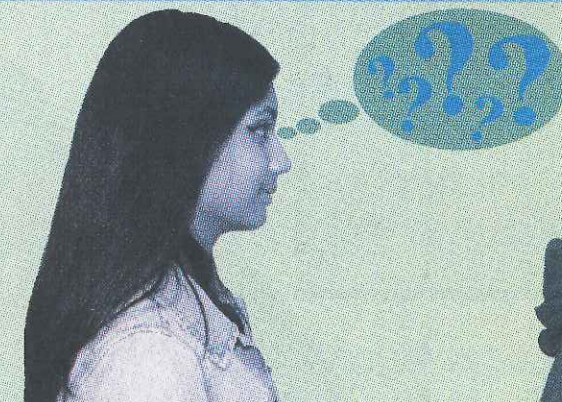
Nausea



Dizziness



Slurred Speech



Delayed Responses



Light Sensitivity

After the injuries

Junior gives up soccer for tennis after concussions

STORY MICHELLE MULLINGS

Young Claire Gaber was tottering across the soccer field when she noticed her shoe. After stumbling, the 4-year-old girl looked down at her feet and noticed that the sole of her cleat had separated, flopping awkwardly under her with each step that she took. Alarmed, she hobbled to her father, the coach of her team.

"Dad, dad, my shoe!" she yelled, pointing down at her tattered cleats.

"Score three more goals and then I'll take you out," her father replied. And she did.

Claire's love for soccer outweighed everything else. After starting organized sports at 4, she continued to compete in countless teams over the years. Claire played soccer, basketball, track, cross country and volleyball. However, while she enjoyed every sport, soccer was where

she found her true passion.

"I liked soccer the best, no matter what," Claire said.

She started playing soccer to follow in

"It's one thing to break your arm, you know, but this is something that could affect her for the rest of her life. I mean your brain is more important than your love of the sport, plain and simple."

-Nicky Gaber, mother

her older sister's footsteps. They played the same position, often competing together on the field. Ever since she was young, Claire dreamed of playing soccer for years to come alongside her older sister.

"We just imagined that they'd say, 'The Gaber sisters scored another goal!'"

Claire said.

Claire remained committed to soccer, joining increasingly difficult teams to challenge herself. When she was 10, she tried out for the Olympic Development Program, which trains select athletes from each age group to compete internationally. She made it onto the age group two years above her. After achieving this, Claire couldn't stop envisioning the possibilities ahead of her—playing high school soccer, then college soccer and maybe even professional. But she never envisioned that her dreams would be jeopardized in only a few years.

"I just kept wanting more and more," Claire said.

Her mother, Nicky Gaber, said Claire's dedication made her a role model to her teammates, because she wasn't the type to give up.

"They'd be losing and she'd be like, 'No, we could still win this,'" Nicky said.

And even when her team did lose,

Claire stayed positive. After all, that's not what was most important to her. What was important was playing the game.

"She cared about the wins and the losses," Nicky said. "But she'd rather be playing and lose than not play at all."

...

Claire suffered her first concussion during eighth grade basketball practice. After misinterpreting a play, Claire and her teammate mistakenly ran in the same direction, ramming into each other headfirst.

Ringling drowned Claire's ears for what felt like forever. Lying face up on the court, she was filled with a sense of stunned fear. Her vision was spinning and her mind was blank.

"It was such a blur," Claire said.

She was quickly sent to the nurse's office, where her mother was called to pick her up. Claire was told by her doctor that she had a concussion and should rest her brain as much as possible, avoiding schoolwork and sports in order to minimize her symptoms. When she did return to school, she struggled to focus.

"I was so out of it, I was so delirious," Claire said. "My teachers would be like, 'Just go home, you're not learning anything.'"

Despite the scare of the injury, Claire was cleared to return to soccer two months after the concussion. This quick return would ultimately play a part in ending her soccer career for good.

Claire's final soccer game was one of the last games of the season. She was almost finished with the school year, and prepared herself to move on to high school soccer. In the middle of the game, a player bumped into her, causing Claire to fall and hit her head lightly on the ground. Instantly, the ringing started all over again. She knew exactly what was wrong. Though she was in shock, she knew the team needed her. So she blew it off and continued to play.

Continued on page 21



PHOTO AMANDA FINERAN

Claire Gaber played soccer since she was 4 years old. After suffering two concussions and having to quit soccer, Gaber found a new love for tennis.

