

# “A-HEAD” of the game

## Student athlete concussions on the rise

by Megan Lacritz

In the U.S., approximately 400,000 student athletes sustain concussions every school year. More than 248,000 of these athletes visit hospital emergency departments as a result of their injuries.

Many athletes are aware of the basic concept of a concussion, a brain injury caused by a blow to the head that shakes the brain inside the skull. However, many do not know about the detrimental consequences of the injury. A concussion changes the way a brain functions, affecting the brain's ability to concentrate while also impacting memory, balance, vision and coordination.

The brain is a soft organ, suspended by cerebral spinal fluid that acts as padding to keep the brain from hitting the skull; however, when hit hard enough, the brain bumps into the skull.

Athletes are not taught how to identify a concussion after they or a teammate undergo a blow to the head.

Benji Zoller [12], the Bulldogs' veteran goalie, suffered from a concussion this summer during soccer practice.

"I had no idea what it would be like if I got a concussion," Zoller said. "People do not know what to look out for."

Zoller explained that everyone on a sports team should know what to look for and what questions to ask if someone were to get a concussion.

Many are unaware that they have a concussion after experiencing a hit,

which can be dangerous if undetected for up to 48 hours.

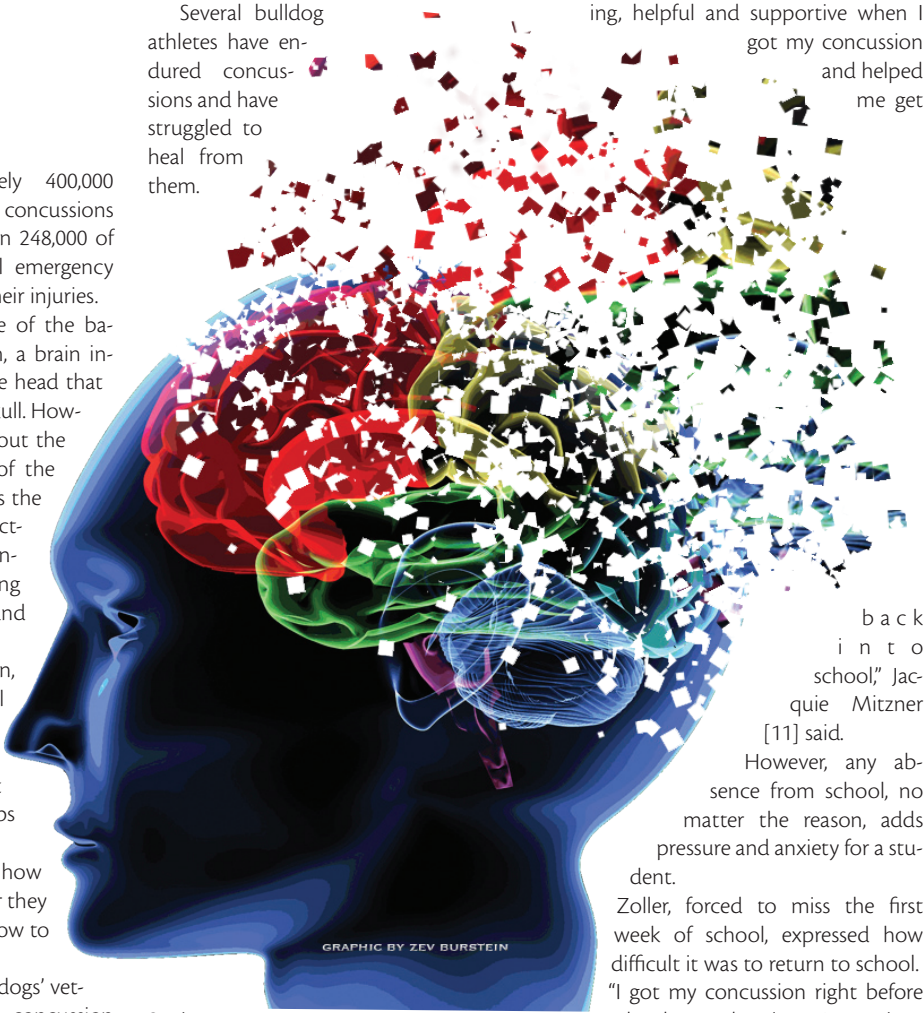
"When I got my concussion, I just thought I was exhausted due to lack of sleep and did not acknowledge having a brain injury," Zoller admitted.

Several bulldog athletes have endured concussions and have struggled to heal from them.

school too quickly, which prolonged my concussion."

Now, teachers and coaches are more patient and compliant with students taking leave for concussions.

"Everyone was very accommodating, helpful and supportive when I got my concussion and helped me get



GRAPHIC BY ZEV BURSTEIN

Senior Risa Mond, two-year captain of the varsity bulldog volleyball team and member of the varsity basketball team, sustained a concussion in her sophomore year playing basketball.

"When I got my concussion, my doctor told me I would not be able to attend school for a while," she said. "I was out for two weeks of school initially, and it was a very difficult time for me."

Mond explained that the state mandates patients to take a concussion test to track their progress to recovery.

"I took one at the beginning and another one three weeks later," Mond said. "I did

worse on my second one due to jumping back into

the year already behind," Zoller said. "My summer work was still not done because I have not had time to work on it."

Symptoms of a concussion vary and can last anywhere from a week to several months. The immediate symptoms of a concussion, according to the Mayo Clinic, include an altered mental status, disorientation, confusion, loss of consciousness, amnesia, nausea, dizziness, headache, blurred vision and imbalance.

Furthermore, many fail to report a concussion until the pain is too much to bear. One does not necessarily lose consciousness when sustaining a concussion, leading many to push off reporting the injury.

"The day I got my concussion, it felt very painful, I felt tired and my skull was bruised," Zoller said. "My head was pounding very hard. I told my mom, and the next morning it still hurt when she told me it was probably a concussion."

Symptoms that may occur within the next few days include sensitivity to light and sound, feeling slowed down, sleep problems, irritability and persisting headaches.

"I became extremely sensitive to light, so if I was in the light at all, it hurt," Mitzner said. "When I walked, my head hurt. It was hard to concentrate, read or write, and I could not do any schoolwork or function in every day life until I recovered."

Last year, the Texas Legislature passed House Bill 2038, also known as Natasha's Law that requires all coaches and athletic trainers to receive training on how to react when a player is suspected of having suffered from a concussion.

Before this bill was passed, coaches were allowed to put an athlete back into practice or a game if they seemed to be symptom-free for 15 minutes. This resulted in more traumatic head injuries. Now athletes must be given clearance by a physician before returning to the field.

Several students attempt to persuade their coaches to let them back into the game or participate in practice so to not let their team down, as Zoller explains.

"Someone got hit on the head on the field during a game and told the coach that he was 'going back out there,' Zoller said. "I felt the same exact way when I hurt myself during practice."

Nevertheless, it is the coach's responsibility to make sure every athlete is taken care of and not put in harm's way.

"When I hurt my head during the basketball game, my coach immediately rushed me off the court and called a timeout to make sure I was okay," Mitzner said.

A recent study in the *Journal of Athletic Training* reported that females are more susceptible to concussions than males. Initial reasoning may be due to the smaller size of females' heads or the lack of developed neck muscles that absorb the impact.

"When I got a concussion, I had horrible headaches all the time, especially when there was light or a lot of noise," Amanda Steinborn [11] said. "I really could not concentrate or focus on something for a long time, and some teachers do not understand how difficult having a concussion can be."

To help facilitate recovery after sustaining a concussion, it is important for an individual to monitor their symptoms by watching for any changes in thinking, behavior and pain and to get plenty of rest. One should not return to sports until cleared by a medical professional. A rushed recovery only worsens progress.

"Luckily, my recovery was short compared to others, about 2-3 weeks, but it was still so hard to catch up at school," soccer player Jonathan Nurko [11] said. "For me, the process of recovery was just sitting in bed for hours at a time with my eyes closed, and I could only listen to seminars, interviews and meditation videos. I could not watch anything, and once I started getting better, I couldn't watch a screen for very long, so I had to watch movies I already knew the plot of."

A wide variety of students participate in Yavneh sports teams, but it is important for every athlete to remember that they are not immune to receiving a concussion. It can happen to anyone at any point in any game or practice. The symptoms of concussions cannot be ignored if a student wants a full recovery. The responsibility falls on the athlete, coach and parents to know of the indicators and to reach out for help in order for sports to be both safe and competitive.

### Fast Facts

15 percent of students have received a concussion from playing sports

Female high school basketball players suffer 240 percent more concussions than males

Injuries associated with participation in sports and recreational activities account for 21% of all traumatic brain injuries among children in the United States

High school athletes who received a concussion are three times more likely to suffer another concussion in the same season

15.8 percent of football players who sustain a concussion severe enough to cause loss of consciousness return to play the same day

25 percent of people fail to receive medical assessment after a concussion

American athletes suffer from 300,000 concussions a year

According to an October 19 survey of 100 students and Southwest Trainers' Association.

Graphic by Megan Lacritz and Risa Mond

### What is a concussion?

A concussion is a type of traumatic brain injury. Concussions are caused by a bump or blow to the head. Even a "ding," "getting your bell rung," or what seems to be a mild bump or blow to the head can be serious.

You can't see a concussion. Signs and symptoms of concussion can show up right after the injury or may not appear or be noticed until days or weeks after the injury. If your child reports any symptoms of concussion, or if you notice the symptoms yourself, seek medical attention right away.

### What are the signs and symptoms of a concussion?

If you have experienced a bump or blow to the head during a game or practice, look for any of the following signs:

- Headache or "pressure" in head
- Nausea or vomiting
- Balance problems or dizziness
- Double or blurry vision
- Sensitivity to light and noise
- Feeling sluggish, hazy, foggy, or groggy
- Concentration or memory problems
- Just "not feeling right" or "feeling down"

### What should you do if you think someone has a concussion?

SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION RIGHT AWAY. A health care professional will be able to decide how serious the concussion is and when it is safe for them to return to regular activities, including sports.

KEEP OUT OF PLAY. Concussions take time to heal. Don't return to play until a health care professional says it's OK. Repeat or later concussions can be very serious. They can cause permanent brain damage, affecting you for a lifetime

Source: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

### Soccer Season Wrap-Up

by: Zach Epstein

For the first time in school history, the Bulldog Varsity Soccer team made the TAPPS state tournament. From a purely statistical perspective, the team's 1-7 record last year and the loss of two seniors made this season look bleak. Rather than succumbing to mediocrity, the Bulldog varsity soccer team upped their game and snuck into the playoffs with a 6-8 record in the most competitive division in the state.

The Bulldogs had their ups and downs this season, including a motivating three game winning streak and a dreadful five game losing streak. They thrived with a pummeling defense and a constantly improving offense. The defense thrived because of the leadership of star middle fullback Max Feist [12], who finished third in voting for district MVP.

"Having Max Feist at the helm, I knew I had little to worry about," Coach Cameron Markey said of the senior.

Another aspect of the team that made this season special was the "freshmen five." Zach Bernstein, Jonathan Gross, Eli Minsky, Sammy Nurko, and Saul Zimmerman each brought their own game and personal contribution to the team. From Nurko faking out a defender like Lionel Messi to Zimmerman running down an opposing forward like Usain Bolt, the freshmen were crucial to the team's success.

Although the Bulldogs were knocked out in their playoff game, the 3-0 loss to state powerhouse Sherman Texoma ended the season on a high note. Limiting a team that averaged nearly seven goals per game and a star forward that averaged almost three himself, to only one, the playoff game proved to be the Bulldogs' most impressive performance – and a sign of a positive future.

Although the Bulldogs look to build on their success next fall, seniors Benji Zoller, Jacob Lampert and Feist will be missed.

"My senior year, I actually felt like I was part of a team. Aiming for the playoff experience was a big goal of mine," Feist said. "It was a difficult end of the season; we went on a losing streak and didn't think we were gonna make it. [Making playoffs] was one of the greatest things that has ever happened to me. We played one of the hardest teams in the district, and we could've just rolled over. But we gave them a run for their money and played amazingly. I'm happy with my entire team for helping me reach that goal."

District Awards: Cameron Markey: District Coach of the Year. Pierce Bell: Forward, All-District Honorable Mention. Max Feist: Defense, All-District Honorable Mention. Jacob Lampert: Midfield, All-District Honorable Mention. Benji Zoller: Goalie, All-District Honorable Mention.