

LIGHTS OUT

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5. SPORTS FEATURE STORY

Increase in reported concussions means athletes and coaches are taking brain injury more seriously than ever before

It's a game Ben Martinsen won't forget. It was a heated district match up on February 6 between the Vikings and Fellowship Academy in Kennendale. Martinsen, a junior forward, made an attempt to steal the ball when he collided with an opposing player. The two struck each other in the head and Ben was hit just below the left eye.

"[I felt] confused, dazed ... [I was] trying to figure out what was going on," Martinsen said. "I had to stay in

the game until a timeout was called. I was dizzy, but I did not black out."

A trainer from the other team came over and evaluated Martinsen's eyes and cognitive memory, he said. The trainer released him to go back into the game at the start of the next quarter, but Martinsen said something didn't feel right.

"[I felt] sluggish," he said. "I don't really remember how I felt."

On the bus ride home, Martinsen began to feel worse.

"My headache was really bad," he said. "I felt nauseous and I could not keep my eyes focused."

He went to the Emergency Room when they got back to Waco and the doctor told him that he had suffered a concussion.

Concussions, an extremely common, but potentially dangerous injury to the brain, have come to our attention as five Vanguard student athletes were diagnosed with the injury this school year. Since they are so com-

mon, sometimes players ignore the symptoms because they want to play on.

But Dr. Bruce Hamilton, a local neurosurgeon, said concussions account for 10 percent of all high school injuries and it's important to take any head injury seriously. And according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the number of reported concussions has doubled in the last 10 years, a sign that people are doing

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just that.

Hamilton explained that concussions occur when a force is applied to the head, either directly to the head, or secondarily to the head when energy is transmitted through the body.

"Since the brain is made up of soft tissue, a direct blow can jolt and damage the brain," he said. "Occasionally, the blow can literally cause the brain to move around inside the skull. The resulting damage can include blood vessel damage, nerve injury and bruising to the brain."

Concussions can be very difficult to diagnose and the screening for a possible concussion should be done only by a professional or someone on the coaching staff and should include a balance assessment, a brief mental status examination, a symptom assessment and the Standardized Assessment of Concussion.

"The diagnoses of a concussion are based on the signs and symptoms people exhibit," Hamilton said.

These signs can include loss of consciousness, speech and behavior, and balance and coordination. Hamilton said that headaches, dizziness,

her back and then her head hit the floor.

"I was dizzy and I saw white spots, but I didn't black out," she said.

norms can be used."

Rest is the most important treatment of concussion, Hamilton said.

"Both physical rest and cognitive

should be delayed until the complete resolution of symptoms, free of medication," Hamilton said.

Barlow was out for two weeks after the injury from any cheerleading.

In Martinsen's case, the recovery was more intensive.

"It was much more serious than [I] expected and a little scary," Martinsen said.

Martinsen was not allowed to return to school for the next four days and he was to be expected to limit as much visual stimulation as he possibly could. He could not use his phone or computer or even watch TV.

After returning, the athlete should not start practicing full force. The CDC reports that one third of all concussions occur during practice.

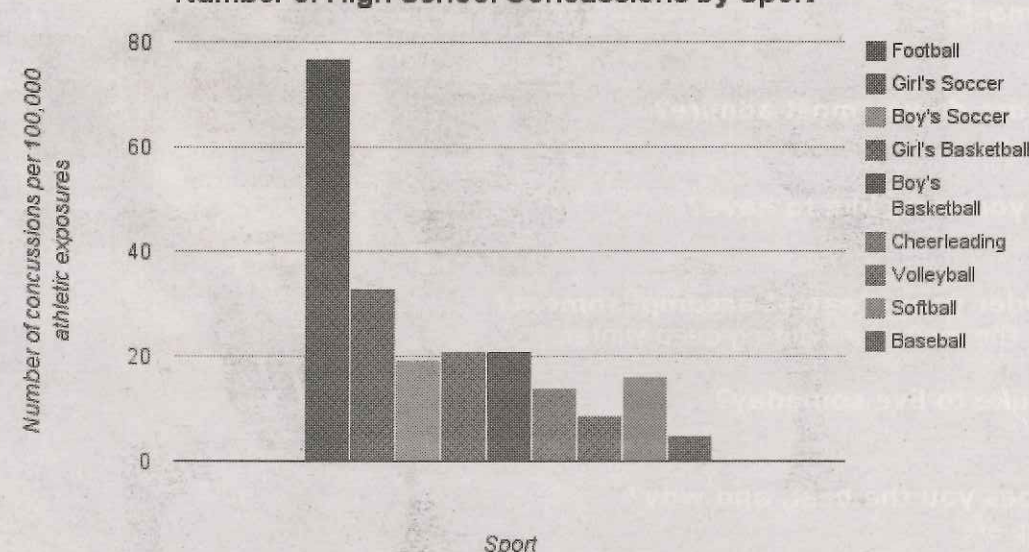
Hamilton said that after the complete resolution of symptoms and medication, a graded return to athletics should be then initiated over

the next 3-5 days, and if the patient is symptom free, full activities can be started.

After recovering, Martinsen said that, if it happened again, he would follow up with his own pediatrician right away and not have waited as long.

"I think people don't take a concussion very seriously when it cer-

Number of High School Concussions by Sport



Sourced: Centers for Disease Control, 2013

"[I felt] confusion, dazed ... [I was] trying to figure out what was going on,"

— Ben Martinsen, junior

The two most common radiographic methods in the evaluation of concussion, Hamilton said, are the use of neuroimaging, such as CT and MRI, when there is concern of intracranial injury.

or mental rest is suggested," he said.

As concussion often affects cognitive activities, temporary reduction of the length of the school day, reduction of workload and the delay of assignments and testing should be offered.

"There are no medications or drugs that facilitate recovery from concussion," Hamilton said, "but medications are often used to lessen symptoms."