

Grade 9 Writing Prompt: High School Football and Concussions

Recently in Las Vegas, a candidate for school board has proposed banning high school football because of increasing numbers of players incurring concussions. This proposal is being considered other places, as well. Write an essay to our school board arguing your position on whether or not Davis District should ban high school football. Your essay must be based on the ideas, concepts, and information from the “High School Football and Concussions” passage set.

Manage your time carefully so you can

- Plan your essay;
- Write your essay; and
- Revise and edit your essay

Be sure to

- Include a claim;
- Address counterclaims;
- Use evidence from multiple sources.

Do not over rely on one source. Type your answer in a new Word document.

High School Football's Benefits Outweigh the Risks

My son's high school football team finished 1-9 this year. I wouldn't be prouder of this team if they had gone undefeated.

They made a game of it each Friday night. My son and his teammates have learned more about hard work, sportsmanship and resilience on the football field than anywhere else.

But as much as I enjoy the tradition of high school football, I worry about its future.

My son's school has nearly 2,000 students, but his team is lucky to suit up 20 players for a varsity game. There are a lot more young men who want to play, but whose parents won't let them. Their parents think the risk of brain injury outweighs the benefits of playing.

I understand the concerns and share them. However, I have concluded those concerns are misplaced. I'm a physician and medical researcher at Stanford. I only decided to let my son play after reviewing the medical research.

The study that best demonstrates the risk of football-related brain injury comes from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDCP officials studied 3,439 former National Football League players with at least five years of pension-credited playing seasons between 1959 and 1988.

This is arguably the highest-risk group of players available for study. Among these players, the incidence of neurodegenerative disease is three times higher than in the general population. However, the risk of death from neurodegenerative disease was relatively low in both groups: 3 percent in NFL players, and 1 percent in the general population. The risk associated with a long NFL career is not insignificant but remains small.

The high-profile research that usually connects the dots between football-related concussions and dementia in NFL players lacks enough data. Most of the cases considered focus on former NFL players involved in a lot of high-risk behavior other than football. Also, none of these studies included a control group. Research like this is typically filed away as "interesting, but we need better data."

The key here is that high school football is not the NFL. The data suggests that the normal life of adolescents puts them at risk for brain injury all the time. What would be the alternatives to my son playing football? Sports such as soccer, skiing, rock climbing or lacrosse have similar risk profiles to high school football.

I believe the benefits of playing high school football are worth the risks. Football is an equal-opportunity sport. Different types of athletes make up a football team, the skills needed don't require years of practice, and there is no real advantage for kids with private coaches. A healthy, average athlete can usually find a spot on the team.

When I sit in the stands, I worry when my 160-pound son lines up on the front line of the kick return team. That is only slightly less than I worry when I sit in the passenger seat as he merges onto the highway. Adolescence is a scary time for parents.

In spite of those fears, I say to all you parents who are keeping your sons from playing football, I say, "Let them play."

SPORTS CONCUSSION STATISTICS

Head impacts and concussions caused by contact sports are a quickly growing epidemic among young athletes. When left unnoticed, concussions can result in long-term brain damage and may even prove fatal.

It is critical that coaches, players and parents are aware of the dangers of concussions. This preserves the young athlete's head health, mental awareness and ability to succeed. They also need to know how to properly perform a concussion evaluation.

CDC reports show that the amount of reported concussions has doubled in the last 10 years. The American Academy of Pediatrics has reported that emergency room visits for concussions in kids ages 8 to 13 years old has doubled. Concussions have risen 200 percent among teens ages 14 to 19 in the last decade.

The first hit is a problem. However, the second or third head impact can cause permanent long-term brain damage. Repeated sports concussions are shown to increase the likelihood of catastrophic head injury.

High school football accounts for 47 percent of all reported sports concussions. 33 percent of concussions occur during practice. Ice hockey and soccer hold high risk for brain injury after football.

If no doctor is present to assess the head impact, head health management standards decline. Athletes are left defenseless without information readily available about their own health.

Sports Concussion Statistics:

- 3,800,000 concussions reported in 2012, double what was reported in 2002
- 33% of all sports concussions happen at practice
- 47% of all reported sports concussions occur during high school football
- 1 in 5 high school athletes will sustain a sports concussion during the season
- 33% of high school athletes report two or more concussions in the same year
- 4 to 5 million concussions occur annually
- 90% of most concussions do not involve passing out
- An estimated 5.3 million Americans live with a traumatic brain injury-related disability (CDC)

Concussion Rates per Sport

The numbers below show the amount of sports concussions taking place per 100,000 athletic exposures. An athletic exposure is defined as one athlete participating in one organized high school athletic practice or competition.

- Football: 64 - 76.8
- Boys' ice hockey: 54
- Girl's soccer: 33
- Boys' lacrosse: 40 - 46.6
- Girls' lacrosse: 31 - 35
- Boys' soccer: 19 - 19.2
- Boys' wrestling: 22 - 23.9
- Girls' basketball: 18.6 - 21
- Girls' softball: 16 - 16.3
- Boys' basketball: 16 - 21.2
- Girls' field hockey: 22 - 24.9
- Cheerleading: 11.5 to 14
- Girls' volleyball: 6 - 8.6
- Boys' baseball: Between 4.6 - 5
- Girls' gymnastics: 7

Should Your Child Play High School Football?

Guts, glory and Gatorade. That's what high school football should be about.

More than a million kids across the country suited up this year, and most of them finished the season stronger than when they started. Seven of them died. Last year, 11 players died, five from on-field injuries. Over the past decade, about three deaths per year were directly related to football; in 2013, there were eight.

So, should your child play high school football?

Thanks to the NFL, we've learned a lot about the hazards of concussions at the sport's highest level. We're only beginning to understand the long-term effects of repeated blows to the heads of adult professional players. We know even less about how those injuries affect still-developing young brains. The number of concussions in NFL regular season games has gone down by 35 percent in three years because of rule changes. Rule changes and medical protocols can reduce injuries, but they can't make the game safe.

Parents are realizing this, and so are kids.

Football is still the most popular high school sport, but the numbers have been trending down for several years — a drop of about 2.5 percent since 2009. Participation is down at the youth level, too.

That's one way to minimize risk — don't play football. Another way would be to promote flag or touch leagues, a suggestion typically looked down upon: Football isn't football without tackling. Tackling is a purposeful collision designed to bring a player to the ground.

The American Academy of Pediatrics released a policy statement calling for more nontackling leagues for youth players, more instruction in proper tackling techniques, and zero tolerance for illegal hits to the head.

Parents, don't assume the existing rules are good enough — or that your school is following them.

Are referees throwing the flag on illegal tackles? If they're not, then sound off.

Does your school have an athletic trainer or other medical professional at the game? Find out. Many schools are more likely to have a medical pro at a varsity game than a Thursday afternoon freshman scrimmage. A doctor can determine if a student should return to the game.

Parents need to ask questions, weigh the risks and demand policies and practices that protect their kids. They have to ask themselves if it's enough. They have to be willing to say no to football.

“Should Your Child Play High School Football?” *Chicago Tribune*, 30 October 2015. Web. 17 June 2016.

In October 2012, the American Academy of Pediatrics published the results of research done on high school football players and concussions. A private Internet survey was distributed and 134 varsity players responded.

>10% reported they have been diagnosed with a concussion by a physician or team trainer

32% reported concussion-like symptoms at some point over the last two years, but didn't see a doctor

53% said they are more aware of concussion symptoms than they were when entering high school

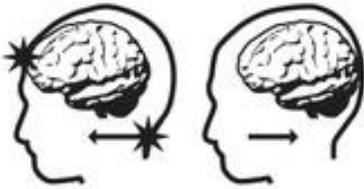
38% reported they are concerned about the long-term effects of concussions

Source: aap.confex.com/aap/2012/webprogram/Paper15737.html

Head games: concussion crisis in football

As athletes get bigger, stronger and faster than ever before, concussions - caused by violent collisions - are becoming a troubling part of American football.

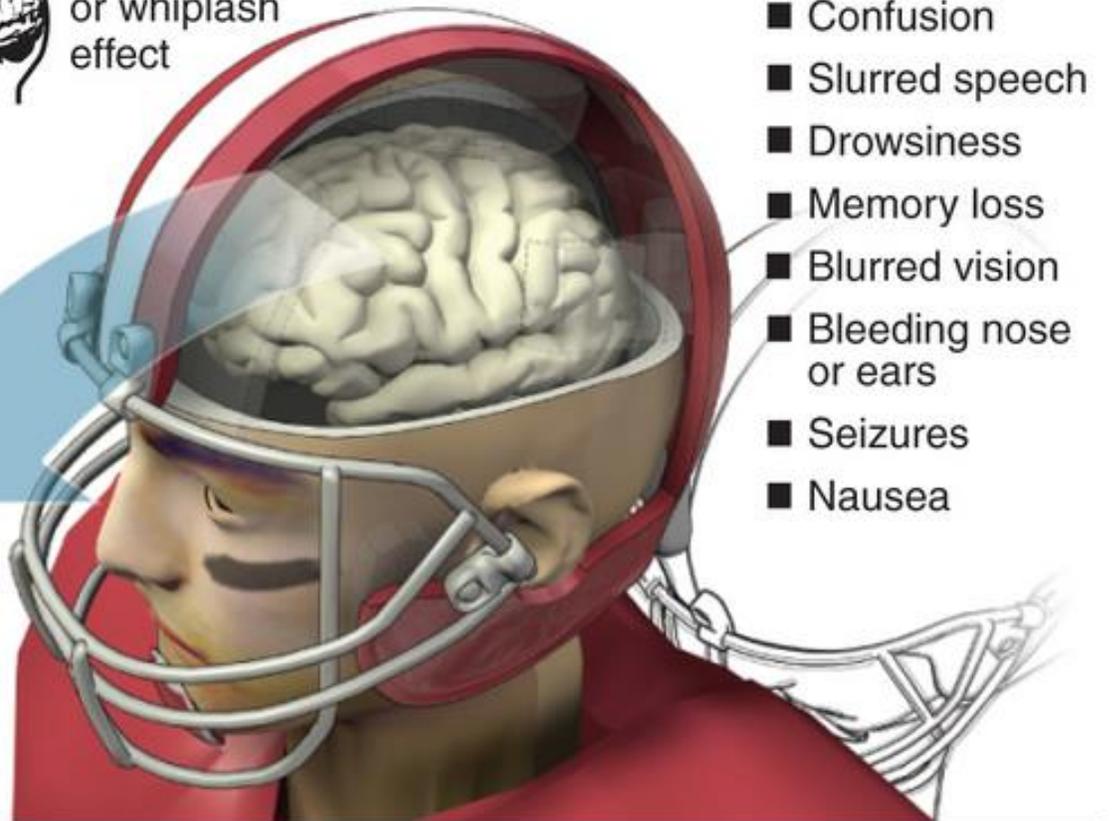
Concussions



Can occur when the brain moves inside the skull from an impact or whiplash effect

Initial impact

The force from the impact causes the brain to strike the inner surface of the skull and can rebound against the opposite side



Some symptoms

- Confusion
- Slurred speech
- Drowsiness
- Memory loss
- Blurred vision
- Bleeding nose or ears
- Seizures
- Nausea