

Wentz hit and concussion another reminder football is not safe for youth | Opinion

Updated: January 7, 2020 - 11:38 AM

Stephen F. Gambescia, for the Philadelphia Inquirer



YONG KIM / Staff Photographer

The concussion-causing helmet-to-helmet and head-to-ground tackle on Eagles quarterback Carson Wentz in a first round NFL playoff game should have us conclude that on balance, playing football at any level is a bad idea. Parents should go with their instincts and not let their children play the game. School board administrators and scholastic leaders should seriously consider stopping their sponsorship of youth football.

While agreeing to play pro football is a classic example of assumption of risk for law school students learning about defenses for tortious suits, it is questionable why we aid and abet our kids playing a game that by design aims to cause bodily harm. Dressing our children up like gladiators and sending them onto a field to be body to body targets should give us pause that something is wrong.

No amount of “advances in” equipment technology will protect the head in football. The head is inextricably linked to the game and is “in play” every play and for every player. No amount of teaching how to tackle properly, let alone be subject to unintended, cheap, or intended smacks to the head, will eliminate the risk of head injury. “Get your head in the game!” is more than a motivational shout by a coach. The head de facto serves as the tool for the assault as well as often being the target. Do an online search for the “best hits” of the year, and for any year, in college and pro football and those hits will involve the heads of players.

All sports have some degree of risk of bodily injury. However, the nature and extent of bodily harm due to youth playing football is perverse. Football has one of the [highest number of incidents](#) of players with head impact injuries among youth sport, and [concussions are on the rise](#) in youth and high school football, even among the youngest players.

The playing of football as inherently injurious to health has captured the national conscience in the last few years through reports in news magazines, documentaries, and movies showing the long-term effects of playing football, and [school leaders](#) deciding to [drop the sport](#).

There are plenty of physically challenging, character building, team building, and spectator pleasing sports available to school-age children. No question that turning our backs on football seems un-American, as we invest a lot of time, attention, emotion, and money in the sport at all levels of play. However, there are plenty of schools and even colleges that show schools can serve the educational and socialization mission for students without a football team.

Some players will say that what they enjoyed most in the sport is not the episodic play but the conditioning. (Actual player time in football is minuscule compared to the total time it takes to complete a game.) There are plenty of other sports for which our youth can challenge themselves to go faster, higher, and be stronger and several of these can be sports for a lifetime — rather than one that takes you out of the game because in the long-term it's too dangerous.

While youth football has played a significant sociocultural and economic role in our country, in the long run, we need to question why we expend so much time, money, and energy for an enterprise that invariably sacrifices so many young minds, bodies, and sometimes spirits. It is time for school leaders and parents to take seriously the importance of getting our children off the gridiron.

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Posted: January 7, 2020 - 11:38 AM; printed January 9, 2020
Stephen F. Gambescia, for the Inquirer