Just a Ding?

The NFL responds to research on football-related concussion



BACKGROUND

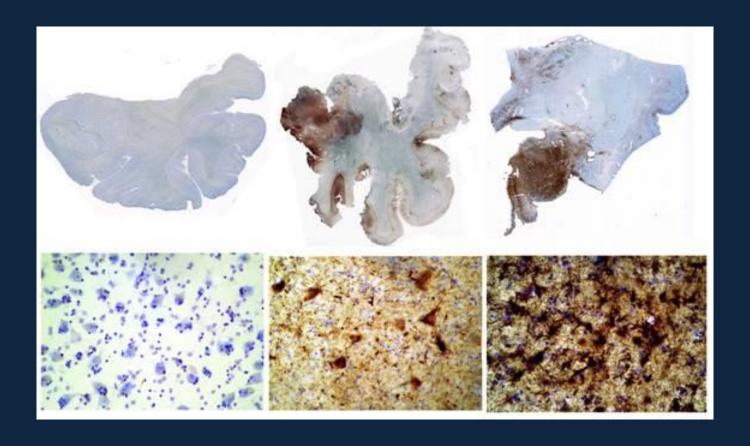
National Football League

- Professional American football
- 32 teams
- Average franchise value: \$1.02 billion (2010)
- Broadcast television deals:
 \$95.8 million per team (2010)
- Founded in 1920



Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy

- A progressive degenerative disease found in individuals who have been subjected to multiple concussions and other forms of head injury
- Linked to memory loss, confusion, impaired judgment, paranoia, impulse control problems, aggression, depression, and progressive dementia
- Can only be diagnosed posthumously via autopsy
- Characteristic streaks of a protein called tau found on the brain

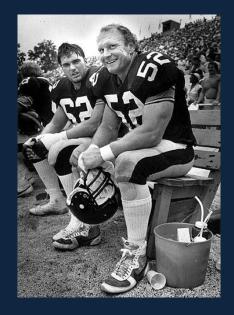


ISSUE TIMELINE: PART 1

2002-2007

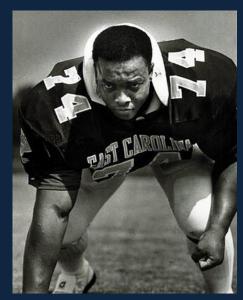
First Diagnoses of CTE

Mike Webster



Diagnosed: 2002 Case published: 2005

Terry Long



Diagnosed: 2005 Case published: 2006

Andre Waters



Diagnosed: 2006
Story published in
New York Times: 2007

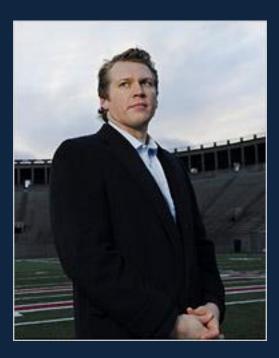
The NFL Response

 MTBI Committee dismisses Omalu's research in medical journals

"The picture is not really complete until we have the opportunity to look at the same group of people over time."

Chris Nowinski

- Football player at Harvard University
- Professional wrestler with WWE
- Suffered from multiple concussions
- Founder of Sports Legacy Institute



Media Coverage

- Chris Nowinski
 contacts Alan Schwarz
 with a tip on the
 Waters case
- Schwarz breaks the story in the New York Times
- Coverage begins to snowball

The New York Times

Expert Ties Ex-Player's Suicide to Brain Damage



Eagles safety Andre Waters making a tackle in 1988. Waters had a reputation as one of football's hardest-hitting defensive

By ALAN SCHWARZ Published: January 18, 2007

Since the former National Football League player Andre Waters killed himself in November, an explanation for his <u>suicide</u> has remained a mystery. But after examining remains of Mr. Waters's brain, a neuropathologist in Pittsburgh is claiming that Mr. Waters had sustained brain damage from playing football and he says that led to his <u>depression</u> and ultimate death.

NFL Takes Action

- Overall message is the same: "We need more research."
- Launch "88 Plan" to assist retires suffering from dementia
- Hold concussion conference

Conflicting Guidance

- NFL suggests stricter return-to-play guidelines, but does not impose them on individual teams
- MTBI committee statement:

"Current research with professional athletes has not shown that having more than one or two concussions leads to permanent problems if each injury is managed properly. It is important to understand that there is no magic number for how many concussions is too many."

Discussion Questions: Part 1

- It could be argued that Chris Nowinski played a central role in the unfolding of the Waters case, the media response and the NFL's subsequent actions. Do you agree? How did Nowinski's background position him to reach out to the different publics in this case: the players' families, the media, the researchers?
- The NFL initially chose to respond to the emerging issue of CTE through the scientific community, with members of the MTBI committee acting as its primary spokespeople. Was this a good decision?

Discussion Questions: Part 1

 When faced with attention from the mainstream media, the NFL chose to continue with a similar message—"we need additional research"—and the same spokespeople. How did this decision affect the NFL's credibility? Would you have chosen the same strategy?

ISSUE TIMELINE: PART 2

2008-2010

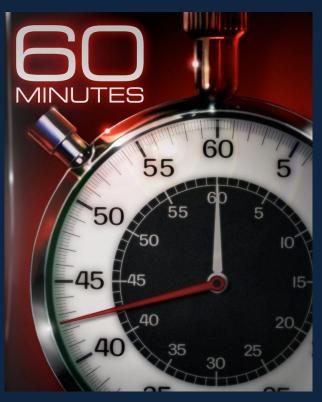
Controversy Renewed in 2009

- The Center for the Study of Chronic Encephalopathy (CSTE) discovers the early stages of CTE in an 18 year old high school football player
- Results from an NFL-sponsored survey show retired NFL players have higher rates of earlyonset dementia; the NFL denies the validity of the study

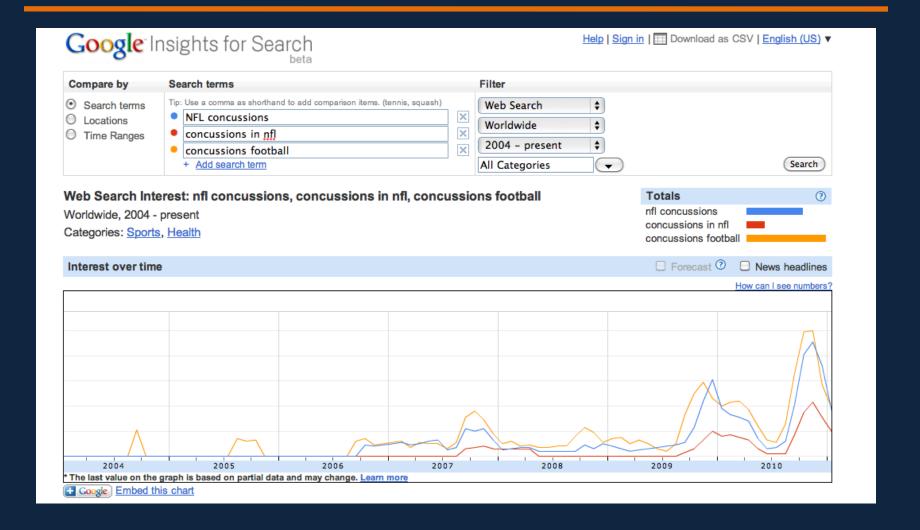
Media Coverage Grows

Increased media coverage





Public Interest Also Grows



Congressional Hearings

- October 28, 2009 hearings with House Judiciary Committee
- Antitrust exemption threatened

The NFL Responds

 On December 20, 2009, the NFL issued a statement acknowledging the long-term health risks of concussions:

"It's quite obvious from the medical research that's been done that concussions can lead to long-term problems."

The NFL Responds

- Revamps the MTBI committee to include outside experts and an expanded focus
- Supports independent research centers
 - Conference
 - "No strings attached" financial support
- Rule changes

Young Athlete Initiatives

- Lobby for more stringent return-to-play laws on the state and national level
- Educational poster for high school athletes in partnership with the CDC
- Events for parents, coaches and players in conjunction with the Sports Legacy Institute

CONCUSSION

A Must Read for Young Athletes

Let's Take Brain Injuries Out of Play

CONCUSSION FACTS

- · A concussion is a brain injury that affects how your brain works.
- · A concussion is caused by a blow to the head or body:
- from contact with being hit by a piece another player, of equipment such hitting a hard surface as a lacrosse stick. such as the ground, hockey puck, or field ice, or court, or hockey ball.
- · A concussion can happen even if you haven't been knocked unconscious.
- . If you think you have a concussion, you should not return to play on the day of the injury and until a health care professional says you are OK to return to play.

CONCUSSION SYMPTOMS

- · Concussion symptoms differ with each person and with each injury, and may not be noticeable for hours or days. Common symptoms include:
- Headache Confusion
- Nausea or vomiting · Bothered by light
- Difficulty remembering or paying attention
- Double or blurry
- or dizziness

groggy

- hazy, foggy, or consciousness
- · Feeling irritable, more emotional. or "down"

WHY SHOULD I REPORT MY SYMPTOMS?

- · Unlike with some other injuries, playing or practicing with concussion symptoms is dangerous and can lead to a longer recovery and a delay in your return to play.
- · While your brain is still healing, you are much more likely to have another concussion. Repeat concussions can increase the time it takes for you to recover and the likelihood of long term problems.
- · In rare cases, repeat concussions in young athletes can result in brain swelling or permanent damage to your brain. They can even be fatal.

*For more information about concussion and other types of traumatic brain injuries, go to

www.cdc.gov/Concussion

A part of CDG's Heads Up series

During recovery, exercising or activities that involve a lot of concentration (such as studying, working on the computer, or playing video games) may cause concussion symptoms to reappear or get worse.

What Should | Do if | Think | Have a Concussion?

DON'T HIDE IT. Ignoring your symptoms and trying to "tough it out" often makes symptoms worse. Tell your coach, parent, and REPORT IT. athletic trainer if you think you or one of your teammates may have a concussion. Don't let anyone pressure you into continuing to practice or play with a concussion.

GET CHECKED OUT. Only a health care professional can tell if you have a concussion and when it's OK to return to play. Sports have injury timeouts and player substitutions so that you can get checked out and the team can perform at its best. The sooner you get checked out, the sooner you may be able to safely return to play.

TAKE CARE OF A concussion can affect your ability to do schoolwork and other activities. Most athletes with a concussion get better and return to sports, but it is important to rest and give your brain time to heal. A repeat concussion that occurs while your brain is still healing can cause long-term problems that may change your life forever.

All concussions are serious. Don't hide it, report it. Take time to recover. It's better to miss one game than the whole season.

























Discussion Questions: Part 2

- Map the progression of the issue according to the 5 stages of the issues life cycle. What events prompted escalation of the issue? How would you classify the issue currently?
- One key strategy for the NFL in 2010 is to position itself as a leader/resource in the area of concussions in young athletes. Have they succeeded in positioning themselves this way? Is this an effective strategy?

Discussion Questions: Part 2

- Research on the effects of sub-concussive hits is growing.
 What can the NFL do to stay in front of this new development?
- How did the NFL's relationship to the federal government influence their actions? If you were directing public relations for the NFL what would be your governmental relations goals? If you were directing public relations for the Sports Legacy Institute what would be your governmental relations goals?