

INDYSTAR★COM

Athletes of all sports at risk of dangerous concussions

Written by

Quinn Andrews, 17, and David Schiele, 15

1:17 AM, Jun. 27, 2011 |

It's the fourth quarter, and the last thing you remember is running to the end zone. Your teammates are helping you to the sidelines, and your head feels strange. The team doctor evaluates you and says you have a concussion.

Eric McMechan, 18, knows firsthand that sense of confusion. In his four-year football career at Park Tudor, he had two concussions, but he didn't recognize the symptoms of his first one.

"I just knew that when I turned and stuff, I was having trouble walking. My head felt kind of fuzzy," he said.

Dr. Daniel E. Kraft, director of Riley Sports Medicine, specializes in treating children and adolescents. He sees many concussions, which he defines as "a bruise on the brain."

Although most bruises are considered inconsequential, concussions can be serious. In a concussion, the brain slams into the inside of the skull, damaging and

destroying brain cells and setting off biochemical events that might result in long-term deficits.

"I tell my patients that we know you've had a concussion when two things occur: Number one, you've had an injury to your head or some type of trauma to your head, and Number two, you have a symptom of that injury -- headache, dizziness, feeling dazed or disoriented, loss of memory right before the accident or right after the accident, feeling confused, not being able to concentrate," he said.

Concussions have come into the spotlight lately as many players in the NFL are being diagnosed with them. More than 60 percent had sustained a concussion during their careers, according to a 2000 study of 1,000 former football players.

But concussions aren't limited to football players. They happen in all sorts of sports, including soccer, cheerleading and figure skating.

Advertisement



COMING SOON!

hatching deals daily

50-90% off local dining, shopping, and more

Sign up now at DealChicken.com

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

INDYSTAR★COM

Mary Claire Hoven, 17, is a recent Carmel High School graduate who received multiple concussions while cheerleading.

She described one episode: "We were at the University of Kentucky with my cheer team, and a girl came down on me on a back spot, and my flyer came down on my head, and then I hit the floor pretty hard."

Hoven blacked out and then threw up. She was diagnosed with a concussion the next day.

Jillian Phillips, 15, says concussions are common in figure skating, especially in pairs. She's had multiple concussions since she started the sport at age 3. The most serious involved a fall she had after her skates had been sharpened incorrectly.

"When I went to stop, the skate cut into the ice right away, and I wasn't prepared for that and I rocked over and landed on the side of my head," she said. "I blacked out."

Kraft stresses the importance of immediately removing the injured athlete from competition to avoid further damage to the brain and nerves. Most are required to rest, often in a dark room, and to avoid taxing themselves mentally and physically.

Before they return to action, most injured athletes are required to pass the ImPACT test (Immediate Post-Concussion Assessment and Cognitive Testing), a 20-minute computer comprehension test, which can be administered by a school nurse or an athletic trainer. It measures reaction time, attention span and problem-

solving skills, and is usually administered soon after injury and after the athlete has had time to recover.

"It gives us an idea, kind of a road map, of what the patient's functioning is normally, and then after they get injured, that road map needs to be the same as it was before," Kraft said.

ImPACT tests are becoming standard for every athlete who has sustained a concussion. Ideally, Kraft says, athletes should take the test before their seasons start so coaches and doctors have a benchmark to follow.

The long-term effects of concussions vary based on the severity, Kraft says.

Mimi Strobel played soccer at Lawrence Central High School and is now a sophomore at Indiana University. In high school, she sustained five concussions and can no longer play contact sports. Even though her last concussion was more than a year ago, she still has symptoms, such as

Advertisement

COMING SOON!

hatching deals daily

50-90% off local dining, shopping, and more

Sign up now at DealChicken.com

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™

INDYSTAR★COM

light sensitivity and skewed depth perception.

[Get Listed Here](#)

"I get migraines and headaches a lot. Like if someone just jokingly hits me on the head or if I somehow bump my head, I get a really bad headache," she said.

Kraft stresses the importance of taking care of each concussion.

"Bad things can happen if you have another concussion injury on top of the concussion that's not healed completely," he said.

Some athletes are working on prevention. To continue playing, McMechan bought a Xenith helmet to lessen the severity of impact. "It's just a special helmet with a new design that has air pockets inside the helmet that go around your head," he said.

Because of the cost of the helmet (about \$400), many schools cannot make them standard equipment. McMechan, though, needed the protection -- he had sustained another concussion, and it was much worse than his first.

"My junior year, I received a second concussion. I actually lost consciousness for several minutes, and I had amnesia for about two or three hours."

Reporters Sophia Mathioudakis, 12, and Jessica Wang, 13, contributed to this story.

Ads by Pulse 360

Mortgage Rates Hit 3.13%

If you owe under \$729k you probably qualify for the Govt Refi Program.

www.MortgageRatesExperts.com

New Policy in Indiana

Drivers with no DUIs may be eligible for \$9 per week [car](#) insurance.

www.lifestylejournal.com

Banks Write Off Billions in Credit Debt

See If You Qualify for Debt Settlement!

www.LowerMyBills.com/Debt

Advertisement



COMING SOON!

hatching deals daily

50-90% off local dining, shopping, and more

Sign up now at DealChicken.com

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™