

Head Trauma

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Introduction

On October 12, 2006, 13-year-old Zachery Lystedt, suffered a concussion while playing for the Tahoma Junior High football team in Maple Valley Washington. Even though Zachery was hit hard, he went back into the game. One more hit at the end of the game caused Zachery to lapse into a coma for three months. No one realized how dangerous it was for Zachery to continue playing football with a concussion.

Second-Impact Injuries

It's shocking to think that a friendly middle school football game could end with a healthy young athlete on the brink of death. Yet every year, 140,000 young football players get concussions. Many consider this the price of playing America's most popular sport, a game that for many kids helps build discipline and focus – traits that can help them succeed later in life.

Over the past few years, evidence has mounted that there is a major concussion crisis in youth sports, especially football. Concussions can happen to anyone, at any age. Most heal if treated properly, with rest. But many young athletes return to sports before their brains have completely healed. In Zack's case, it was not the first concussion that caused his brain to bleed and swell. It was those second, third, and fourth small knocks to his head that happened after he went back in the game. In other words, if Zack had stayed on the bench and off the field until his concussion healed, he would likely be playing football today.

After returning to the game, Zack suffered a "second-impact injury." Over the past decade, these injuries have killed or caused major brain damage in more than 50 young football players. Thousands of other young athletes have suffered post-concussion syndrome, a less-severe condition that is life-changing nonetheless. Their untreated concussions often leave them with constant headaches, memory problems, mood swings, and other issues. Some may have these symptoms for the rest of their lives.

Research shows concussions can lead to serious brain diseases later in life. Indeed, dozens of retired NFL players have been diagnosed with profound brain problems that were likely caused by impacts they sustained during their playing years.

