

Football – Why Do We Need It?

BY SANDRA ROHRSTAFF

What do these NFL quarterbacks have in common?

Jay Cutler, Chicago Bears
Alex Smith, San Francisco 49ers
Michael Vick, Philadelphia Eagles

All three of them suffered concussions during football games on the same day -- November 11, 2012. That means that 25% of the NFL games that day saw quarterbacks leave the game with a concussion.

The NFL likely has more money to provide protective gear to its players than any other sports organization in this country. There likely is no sport with more resources to regulate player behavior and to provide professional referees on the field. Yet, concussions continue to occur and players continue to live lives greatly altered by their professional careers.

So, do we really want our sons to play football? Are our neighborhood sports programs safer than the professional sport with millions of dollars to be used to protect players?

The answer to the second question is yes & no. Youth sports are “safer” just because youth are not as strong or aggressive as professional players are. Youth sports come up short, however, in financial and personnel resources. Youth sports rely heavily on volunteers to run the programs, coach the players and regulate the play. Adults who volunteer to work in youth sports typically have experience playing or coaching or refereeing that sport. Also typically, none is a professional. Furthermore, youth sports do not always have trained medical teams standing on the sidelines.

I was the only one of my parents’ four children who did not play football in junior high, high school and college. (Hint: I was their only daughter.) My father was a high school football coach (in Texas), and my mother and I sat in the stands during hundreds of football games for years. Frankly, concussions did not cross my mind then. It was a different story, though, when I was sitting in the stands watching my own son play football. I was glad when he decided to concentrate on a different sport.

Am I advocating eliminating professional football? No. NFL is full of adult men who can make their own decisions about whether and how and how long to play the “game”. I have recently begun to hear, however, that the growing attention being

paid to number of concussions and other serious injuries that happen on the gridiron may mean the beginning of the end of that violent sport.

Am I advocating eliminating youth sports, tackle football in particular? I'm not sure. To a great extent, kids participate in sports at their parents' behest, or at least permission. More often than not, the parent had a good experience with the youth sport and wants the child to have the same kind of experience. None of that is objectionable.

However, when you sign your son up for youth tackle football, be sure to think about the seriousness of the risk you are taking. Sure, most kids who play tackle football as a youth do not get a concussion or broken neck or even a broken arm or leg. However, the consequences of a brain or spinal injury are so severe, parents should take time to seriously consider those consequences. Your son's life may depend on it.

The *Philadelphia Inquirer* online has a series of articles on concussions in sports. Here is a link to the first article in the series, [Fear of concussions reshaping football](#), written by Mike Jensen.