

Opinion: It's time to end football in high school (English 8)

Required Annotations		Student-Created Annotations		Summary / Questions / Reflection	
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More than a million high school students play on their school's tackle football teams. While playing, they each suffer hundreds of violent blows to the head in one season.

Research shows the alarming effect of rattling brains this many times. Each year, roughly 264,000 high school students suffer traumatic brain injury (TBI) and mental impairment. The brain injuries hurt students' ability to learn and succeed in school. Studies show patterns that connect players' head shots with TBI and mental **impairment**. The research has used helmet sensors, MRI brain scans and memory tests.

Thomas Talavage is a biomedical engineering professor at Purdue University. Talavage presented the results of these studies about head injuries at a 2014 White House summit on sports injuries.

A concussion is one typical brain injury caused by a jarring hit to one's head. However, Talavage explained that players with or without concussions both show decreased activity in areas of the brain most exposed to contact. They all have greater difficulty with simple intellectual tasks during a high school season, Talavage said.

As evidence of football's risk mounts, players have begun abandoning the game. NFL linebacker Joshua Perry retired this year after two seasons. He cited his growing number of concussions as the reason. Some schools have also reduced or cancelled football programs. Nevertheless, many high school students keep playing.

Educators Should Not Put Kids In Harm's Way

This poses some big questions for school leaders.

Is sponsoring an activity that causes disabling brain injury in line with educators' responsibilities to students? Are there educational benefits to football that outweigh the risks? Does the presumed **consent** of players and parents relieve educators of their duty to protect students from harm? The answers are clearly no, no and no.

Schools shouldn't support activities known to cause mental impairment in a significant percentage of participants. Nor should schools support activities **undercutting** their educational aims. For a quarter of football players, what happens on the field reduces their capacity to learn in the classroom.

Beyond mental impairment, repeated blows to the head often cause concussions. Symptoms of a concussion include headaches, memory loss, sleep loss and mood disorders.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the economic cost is high. Caring for players with TBI cost approximately \$76.5 billion annually as of 2010. Moreover, the younger children are when they start playing, the more likely they are to develop brain disorders late in life.

Helmets Can Only Do So Much

It's important to recognize that players risk mental impairment even if they don't suffer a concussion. Helmets help prevent skull fractures. However, they don't stop the brain from smashing into the skull each time a player crashes into another player or the ground.

Are there educational benefits supporting these risks? Many claim football

builds character, but there's no evidence it's unique or cost-effective in this respect. Good judgment is a key feature of good character. Studies show improved judgment in students who participate in music, theater and community service programs. However, the mental impairment caused by contact sports is **scarcely** favorable to that.

Even if there were solid evidence that football is more effective for character-building, that wouldn't defend an expensive sport for a few players. Instead, schools should have safer and more affordable sports for all students.

What about the benefits to students who think they have a chance at a professional football career? Should schools provide that opportunity? The answer is, once again, no. According to National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) estimates, only 6.9 percent of high school football players made a college team in the 2016-17 season. Of these, only 253 were later drafted by the NFL or another major league, representing just .0239 percent of high school players. By contrast, about 25 percent — 264,345 high school players — will suffer **traumatic** brain injury and mental impairment. In other words, a high school football player is about 1,000 times more likely to be impaired pursuing an education and other career paths than to have a professional football career. Those odds can't possibly make the risk worthwhile.

Schools Should Be Protecting Students

What moral or legal significance do student and parental consent have? Lawsuits have been filed when students are injured in school activities. When this happens, school districts routinely argue that students and parents gave consent and assumed the risk. However, legal minors have limited capacity to foresee their actions' consequences. Minors are those younger than 18 years old in most states. Their brains are still developing. They aren't old enough to give consent that would legally or morally release coaches and other school authorities from their responsibilities to protect students. With football players, the limited capacity to give meaningful consent may be further weakened. The students' thinking could be clouded by concussion symptoms and intense pressure from coaches and peers.

The legal and moral significance of parental consent is also limited. Educators and school officials have duties to protect students from harm in the school environment. Consent offered by students and parents doesn't release educators from these duties.

In sum, no reason exists for exposing students to tackle football's dangers. It doesn't matter how popular it is. The responsibility for harm to students falls primarily on school officials, and they can end the danger by ending football in schools.

Write a summary of the article in the space below. Remember: a summary touches on the main points of an article; it does not include all the details.