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Supporting Football: The Physical Damage of the Game

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Supporting Football: The Physical Damage of the Game

Abstract

"How ethical it is to support football since it is a sport that 'wreaks devastation on brains and condemns many players to diminished brain functioning, premature dementia, and the like.' ... Instead of asking if supporting football is moral or not I believe we should be asking ourselves as players, coaches, and fans how can we use the gifts, talents and abilities God has given us to create a culture in sports where we demonstrate the spirit of God and work for his glory."

Posting about the morality of supporting football as well as ethics in football from a Christian perspective from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/supporting-football-the-physical-damage-of-the-game/>

Posting is part two of a response to Martin E. Marty's article of January 26, 2015, *Football and Ethics* which can be found at <https://divinity.uchicago.edu/sightings/football-and-ethics-martin-e-marty>. Part one can be viewed at http://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/faculty_work/140/

Keywords

In All Things, football, Christianity, head injury, sports related concussions, ethics

Disciplines

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Comments

In All Things is a publication of the Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College.

Supporting Football: the Physical Damage of the Game

 [inallthings.org/supporting-football-the-physical-damage-of-the-game/](https://allinallthings.org/supporting-football-the-physical-damage-of-the-game/)

Greg Youngblood

On January 30, 2015, Greg Youngblood responded to Martin E. Marty's article *Football and Ethics* in *Why We Should Watch Football*. This article is part two in his response to Marty's article.

The second issue raised by Marty in his article is how ethical it is to support football since it is a sport that "wreaks devastation on brains and condemns many players to diminished brain functioning, premature dementia, and the like." The assumptions made in his statement are not completely accurate. Yes, football has been shown to cause head injuries with long term serious affects, especially at the professional levels where a combination of genetically freakish athletes in their physical prime, given the optimal training in strength, speed, and mechanics make for the perfect storm of potential injury. However, the vast majority of people who participate in football do not fit in this category. Most high school and college athletic trainers and coaches in football report around a 5%-20% concussion rate per year. Some claim that many concussions go unreported. Even if true, this is far from a large percentage of participants that actually suffer from head injuries.

In the *Journal of Athletic Training* article, *Concussions Among United States High School and Collegiate Athletics* (2007), researchers studied the rates of brain injuries occurring in sports participation for high school and college athletes in the age group of 15-24 years of age. While football is definitely the sport that has the majority of the concussions (40.5% of all sports), even at the college level concussions occur at a rate of 0.61 per 1000 athletic exposures (each practice or game make an exposure regardless of its duration). In a given season there would be less than 100 athletic exposures to a football athlete so that would be a rate of .061 concussions per season or 6.1%. The study indicated that brain injuries due to sport were second to motor vehicle crashes for this age group (15-24).

I do not want to minimize the consequences of brain trauma but the data reveals that at amateur levels the number of significant issues is not as high as many argue. We still don't know a lot about the effects that playing football has on the brain and research still needs to be done. We should take as much precaution as possible to protect football athletes. At the professional level there is no doubt the potential for injury is much greater. However, we know much more now than in previous years and many policies, equipment, and procedures have been changed to protect those involved. At the youth levels, all coaches are required to participate in the "Heads Up" program, which educates coaches on proper teaching techniques to reduce potential head and neck injuries. For those like Marty who suggest that supporting football is immoral because there are potential dangers, I would remind him about seatbelt laws that did not exist thirty years ago. Once studies showed that seatbelt use would prevent many serious injuries and fatalities, lawmakers began requiring people to buckle up and injuries were reduced significantly. Likewise in football, now that we know and understand the nature of head injuries we are doing much more to reduce the damage.

In both car-seatbelt and football cases, however, the risk will never be completely eliminated but is something that is understood. In sport law there is a concept of inherent risk that says a person knows and understands that by playing football or driving a car there is inherent risk that they assume. All current NFL players know and understand the risk they are taking and accept that risk just as we know and understand the risk of driving in a car. Marty suggests that modern day football is similar to the Roman gladiators where slaves performed for the entertainment of the masses. While large money contracts and fame and

fortune are significant lures to professional football, it is a long way from saying they are slaves. I would suggest that the dilemma goes back to what has been discussed previously in this article that the real worry should be the idolization of the sport that may cause some to play, coach, or watch for the wrong reasons or subject their bodies to harm when they are not physically able. As with all things in this world it comes back to the spiritual question as to what does God call us to do and how does he call us to behave if we want to honor Him and be obedient to His commands. Instead of asking if supporting football is moral or not I believe we should be asking ourselves as players, coaches, and fans how can we use the gifts, talents and abilities God has given us to create a culture in sports where we demonstrate the spirit of God and work for His glory.

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