

Concussions raise health concerns

During a football practice, an athlete got hit and came into the training room complaining of a really bad headache. North's athletic trainer Shannon Zolla noted that the athlete seemed out of it and didn't feel well. He was then taken through an evaluation sheet and the Sports Concussion Assessment Tool test, which determined he suffered a concussion.

Concussions have had a long history in sports; however, just now a few players are speaking out about their injuries from years past.

Hall of Fame quarterback Brett Favre, who was on the news for his sport injuries, is still experiencing symptoms from being sacked 525 times. Some of his symptoms are not being able to finish a sentence or remembering a certain word. Concussions have been on the rise in student athletes. At least six high school football players nationwide have died from head and neck injuries in 2013.

Zolla notes that the most common sports to cause concussions are soccer and football. Zolla has seen 25 concussions in her career.

Cheerleader junior Brittany Ponder has been competing in cheer for several years, and last year she suffered two concussions.

"I was at competitive cheer and a girl was doing a double-twisting basket and her whole body landed on my head," Ponder said. "I had a lot of dizziness, I couldn't concentrate, and I was prone to lights so it hurt my eyes to be under a lot of lighting."

In October, freshman Charlie Matson endured a concussion during a high school football game.

"It was a head on collision, and after it happened, I experienced dizziness and a lot of headaches," Matson said.

Soccer and football are the sports where concussions are the most common. Concussions affect not only youth athletes, but collegiate and professional athletes.

About every 21 seconds, someone in the United States receives a serious brain injury

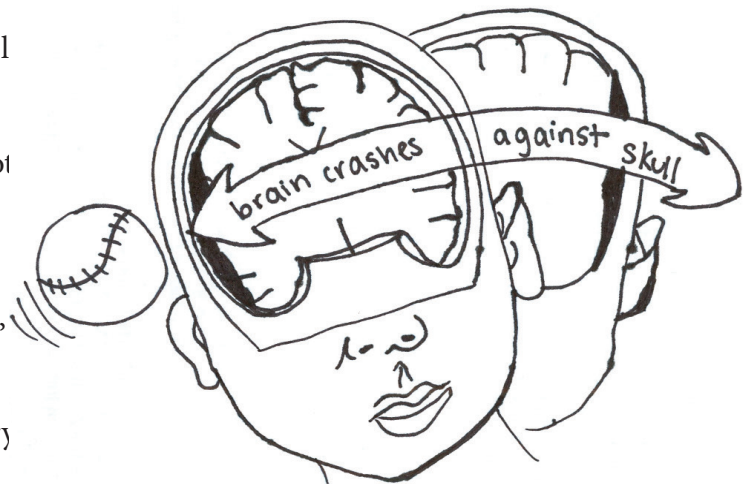
"The Kansas State High School Athletic Association has put out a rule that we have to follow that if anyone is suspected of having a concussion, whether they're sure they have one or not, that athlete cannot go play that same day of practice or a game," Zolla said.

Although there isn't a guarantee soccer players won't run into each other or football players won't get tackled, there are other ways to help prevent a concussion.

"We can make sure a football player's helmet is properly secure. If it's too loose, it can cause the brain to shift more because the head is moving inside the helmet when impact occurs," Zolla said. "Equipment should be fixed after each sports season and up to standards for the next year."

Concussions are happening so often that it has left parents to pull their children out of youth football.

ESPN also released some data on the decline



Concussions are caused by the collision of the brain and the skull. The impact could cause internal bleeding in the brain. Illustration by Elizabeth Tran.

of participation in youth football. The number of kids who played youth football was down 10 percent. One reason for the decline is that the rate of concussions in youth football is at least four percent higher than previous years.

Additionally, if concussions aren't properly taken care of, they can result in long-term damage to the athlete. As with Matson and Ponder, the two most common symptoms of a concussion are headaches and dizziness. Other symptoms, such as fatigue, low energy and sensitivity to light and noise, can occur.

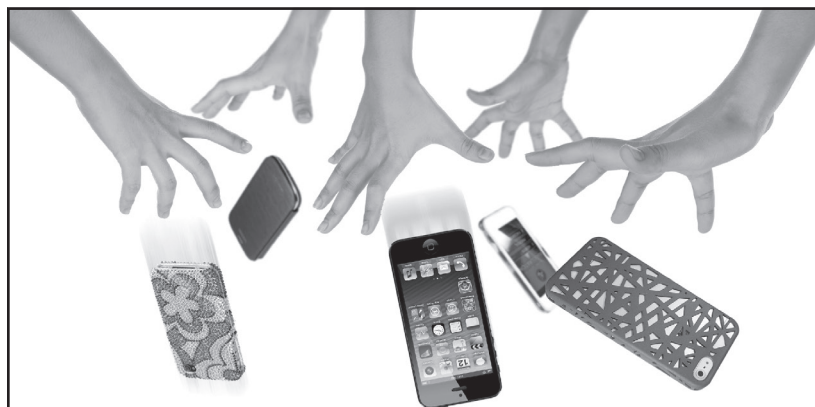
"Some kids think they are invincible and can play through the concussion, but it's not good for them," Zolla said.

Matson said the day he got his concussion he didn't realize it was that serious, so he continued to go to a concert right after.

"The concert actually ended up hurting my head even more. I had a lot of headaches and dizziness from it," Matson said.

Although increasing the education on the seriousness of concussions won't necessarily help prevent them, it is important for people to know what they are facing while participating in their respective sport.

"Getting my concussion changed my awareness on how serious concussions are, and that I could still have some symptoms after it's gone," Ponder said.



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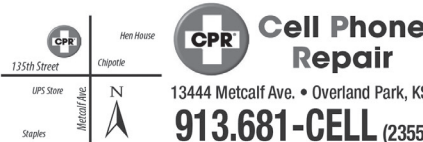
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