



Will Football go the way of Boxing?

Boxing was a popular NCAA sport from the 1930s to 1960. Over 10,000 spectators at the University of Wisconsin Field House watched student athlete Charlie Mohr collapse after a hard punch to the head. When Mohr died eight days later, the UW faculty voted to abolish boxing, and the NCAA discontinued the sport soon after.

Today, it has been scientifically established beyond a reasonable doubt that playing football is likely to cause permanent brain damage. The damage is cumulative rather than immediate and dramatic as in boxing. If football were a new sport, however, and if universities like CSU had not invested so many hundreds of millions of dollars in football, the sport would be banished for the simple moral reason that universities should not support brain-injuring activities.

The culture of football is so entrenched in the imaginations of many fans that otherwise compassionate people can still enjoy the game by suppressing the knowledge of its irreparable harm to the players. However, the evidence is mounting that the cumulative damage starts early, since the landmark discovery in 2005 of chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) in mentally and emotionally harmed NFL players. More fans are asking whether continuing to support the game is ethical, and the fact that most college football players are black while the spectators are overwhelmingly white makes the situation more troubling.

Last year, the Clinical Journal of Sports Medicine reported that “MRI scans of 11 former collegiate football players showed evidence of significantly lower cortical thickness within portions of both the frontal and temporal cortex of the brain, versus a similar group of track-and-field athletes.” Last July, the Journal of the American Medical Society reported that “In a convenience sample of deceased players of American football, a high proportion showed pathological evidence of CTE,” even among those who played football only through college and not professionally. According to the article, early signs of CTE are “impulsive, explosive and sometimes

violent behavior; depression; and a tendency toward suicidality [is associated with] younger age and an earlier stage of CTE pathology.”

The right thing to do for CSU and other colleges is to suspend football, at least until it can be played with reasonable guarantees of safety for our student athletes. The mission and values of CSU dictate that we protect our students and develop their intellects, not put them at risk for brain injuries that cause cognitive and emotional dysfunction. Let’s set a good example (as UW did with boxing) and shut down the football program.

References and more information:

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