



# Letter to the Editor

## Letter to the Editor: Editorial: Orthopaedic Surgeons Should Recommend That Children and Young Adults Not Play Tackle Football

Bruce T. Rougraff MD

To the Editor,

I read your editorial and have waited to write for some time. I agree that children with repeated concussions should not play contact sports and that they probably should not be allowed to play after a second concussion. I also agree that rugby players probably are less prone to develop concussions than those who play American-style football. However, I do not agree that we as

orthopaedic surgeons should support the movement to shut down football.

Football is much safer than it was 5 years ago, and certainly safer than it was when I played in the 1970s. The players are taught how to avoid head trauma through better blocking and tackling techniques. Hitting head first has considerably decreased from the high school game. It is my observation that the helmets used today are much better than those from 5 years ago. Concussion protocols are taken seriously, particularly in football games and practices.

I also believe that some rule changes could easily improve the safety of the game. We as a society should improve the safety of the game rather than abandon the game of football outright. One simple rule change making it illegal to leave your feet when catching a pass or tackling a ball carrier, would likely eliminate 90% of the high-level head trauma that occurs.

A more-scientific approach of studying head trauma during football games could identify other aspects of the game of football that could be changed for safety reasons. Your editorial was written with a negatively slanted view of a game that has many great benefits for young men, which I objected to. My son played youth football and high school football where he was part of four consecutive state championships. He also played rugby and won the national rugby high school tournament. He is currently playing football in college on a team that has won two conference championships. The team aspect of football is important to him and is a major part of why he has good self-esteem and stayed out of trouble as a youth. He has never had a concussion and over all of these years of watching his teams play, a total of five boys have had concussions on his teams. Only one player had more than one concussion. That young man tackled head first, despite being told never to hit that way, and he was counseled to stop participating in the sport.

In contrast, my three daughters played high school and Division I volleyball in college and there were

---

RE: Leopold SS, Dobbs MB. Editorial: Orthopaedic Surgeons Should Recommend That Children and Young Adults Not Play Tackle Football. *Clin Orthop Relat Res.* 2016;474:1533–1537.

The author certifies that he, or any member of his immediate family, has no funding or commercial associations (eg, consultancies, stock ownership, equity interest, patent/licensing arrangements, etc) that might pose a conflict of interest in connection with the submitted article.

All ICMJE Conflict of Interest Forms for authors and *Clinical Orthopaedics and Related Research*® editors and board members are on file with the publication and can be viewed on request.

The opinions expressed are those of the writers, and do not reflect the opinion or policy of *CORR*® or The Association of Bone and Joint Surgeons®.

---

B. T. Rougraff MD (✉)  
OrthoIndy, 8450 Northwest Blvd,  
Indianapolis, IN 46278, USA  
e-mail: brougraff@orthoindy.com;  
brougraff@aol.com

# Letter to the Editor

more concussions in those teams (despite one-eighth the number of participants) and most of the girls with one concussion got repeated concussions. The trainers took the concussion

protocol seriously, but the girls hid their symptoms so that they could play. The parents were not as worried because as one parent told me, “This wasn’t football after all!”

I cannot and will not suggest that any of my patients avoid playing football. I will always support improving the game and being serious about concussion safety.