



Heads up: Student athletes weigh risk of concussions

by junior Grace Jorgensen.

Senior Nathan Randall was only 16 years old when his football dreams came to an end.

"The doctor said that I wasn't allowed to go back for at least four years," said Randall. "If I had another concussion, it would either cause severe, permanent damage, or it would kill me."

Concussion stories like this are not uncommon. It seems like there are more concussions than ever before, leaving many to wonder- when is a bump on the head something more?

Wrapping Your Head Around It

Dr. Greg Selenke explains that concussions are brain injuries in which the blow that causes the concussion "shakes the brain inside the skull, which temporarily prevents the brain from working normally."

Retired NFL defensive lineman Mike Stensrud, who played for the Vikings, Buccaneers, Chiefs, and Redskins, thinks concussions could be the result of an increasingly aggressive sport.

"The players now are so much bigger and faster than we were back then," said Stensrud, "so they collide faster and hit harder than before."

Luckily, Stensrud adds, that coaching through the years has also changed, which might help diagnose concussions that once got ignored.

"(Coaches) didn't think about concussions as a serious injury," said Stensrud. "If you got banged or woozy, it

was always 'You gotta be tough' and 'Don't let an injury keep you from playing the game,'" said Stensrud, "Fortunately, that has stopped."

Keith Harms, who has been coaching for 38 years, agrees there is a change.

"There have always been concussions in sports, but the awareness lately has improved."

Symptoms that coaches and trainers like Hudson's Joe Bahnsen look for include headache, seeing stars, blurred vision, dizziness, emotional change, balance and coordination issues, slurred speech, unequal or abnormal pupil dilation, and memory loss. Unfortunately, sometimes players choose to ignore these warning signs.

Going Head To Head

Junior CJ Christopher, who had two concussions in football, experienced two more concussions this year in basketball. With each concussion, Christopher said the effects only worsened.

Christopher, who was named 2nd team All-Conference and 2nd team All-State in the 2016 season, admits that he ignored the signs.

"Sometimes I tried to hide it so I could keep playing," said CJ. Then came a final blow he couldn't ignore.

"The last time I hit my head on the basketball court, I remember shaking really badly, feeling like I had to throw up. I couldn't see or walk," said Christopher, who was taken to the hospital.

When his doctors put him in a neck brace, it was then the family knew they had "to make some tough decisions". It was the end of Christopher's basketball season.

Heading For Trouble

Sophomore Rachel Bauler experienced a concussion while stunting in cheerleading last fall.

"When I fell, I didn't black out," said Bauler, "but I just laid there, dizzy and with a headache."

Bahnsen believes that every concussion should be treated with concern.

"Concussions, no matter how bad they are, should be taken seriously," said Bahnsen.

Half a year later, Bauler still experiences the effects of her concussion, having headaches more often than she did before.

Knowing there are higher chances of memory loss and Alzheimer's Disease that comes with multiple concussions, Bauler faces the upcoming softball season with caution.

"It worries me that I will get another (concussion)," said Bauler.

Dr. Selenke said that while it is good to be careful, athletes shouldn't be afraid to return to sports if they wait the recommended waiting period after their concussion.

Head On Collision

Randall, who has been prone to multiple concussions, is already experiencing some long-term effects.

"I don't really have an attention span anymore," said Randall. "I forget conversations."

Randall especially struggles in school, having to even take his second semester of junior year online due to his severe headaches. Said Randall, "At school, my concussions make things harder to comprehend, and the lights and noise make my head hurt."

Not only have his multiple concussions kept him from school but from what he loves most, sports.

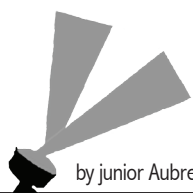
"I couldn't go to football games because it hurt watching my friends play while I sat in the crowd," said Randall. He even had to leave his first prom early last year because the lights and music were too overwhelming.

Get Your Head In The Game

Many agree that the best way to have the concussion discussion is on a case to case basis, to be honest, and to consider all the facts.

"You have athletes who are very committed to their sports and they are willing to go out there and risk it all," said Selenke, "but they have to realize that they are risking their brain, which is something you can never get back."

in the SPOTLIGHT:



by junior Aubrey Gronoski.



"Junior **TRISTIN GILLES**

has put a lot of time into becoming a better all-around soccer player."
- high school boys soccer coach Sue Rink



"Junior **HAILEY ELDER** is

a great team player and has great leadership skills."
- high school girls soccer coach Ashley Smiley



"Senior **CARSON WRIGHT** has

been a staple in mid-distance and is one of the most decorated runners I have had the opportunity to coach."
- high school boys track coach Micah Ruroden



"Senior **MADISON SALLEE**

sets the example for the rest of the track and field team each and every day."
- high school girls track coach Braden Rogers



"Senior **NOAH HAACK**

has the best returning average from last season and has earned 1st Team All-State honors."
- high school boys golf coach Jeff Curley



"Senior **KYLIE KUYAVA-DEBERG** is

a returning senior this year and will be looked to for leadership in our line-up."
- high school girls golf coach Jeff Curley