Honors English 8

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Dangers of Illegal Hits in Football

\*Cheers\* The wide receiver catches the ball and turns up field. \*Crack\* The free safety flies up field and meets the wide receiver with a devastating blow to the head. \*Silence\* The crowd is engulfed with fear as the receiver lies on the ground motionless. \*Sirens\* An ambulance rushes onto the field to help the injured player. \*Shock\* Medics announce that the player is paralyzed from the waist up. \*Whispers\* The fans cannot believe what they just saw.

That was the story of the night that NFL wide receiver Darryl Stingley’s life was dramatically changed. He was paralyzed until his death at age 55, only 30 years after the horrific event took place. Injuries like this consume the lives of football players every year, and they are all the result of illegal hits to the head. So why do people continue to put these devastating hits on innocent players? For the excitement.

Is someone’s whole life really worth a little excitement? Absolutely not. But of course, there are those who disagree. Most of which believe that the hits are just part of the game, and football would be nothing without big hits because of the excitement they bring to the game. Bernard Pollard, free safety of the Baltimore Ravens, claims “The NFL won’t exist in thirty years because the big hits will be gone and the fans won’t want to watch the game anymore." But that’s completely irrelevant because as more and more players are hurt from the injuries, more and more people will become upset, and eventually the sport will just be completely banned anyways. So would you rather sacrifice the hits to keep the football tradition alive or completely lose the sport to keep the hard hits coming for a few more years? The answer is obvious.

Pollard isn't the only player speaking up for the allowance of big hits. Former Pittsburgh Steelers wide receiver Hines Ward also defends bone-crushing tackles. He argues that “helmets are used to allow players to deliver big hits, so the hits should be allowed” Is that really the purpose of the helmet though? Of course not. Helmets were made to protect players from unpredictable things, things that can’t be controlled. They were created to protect players from potentially devastating hits, not to encourage them, which is what Ward is saying.

Drew Pearson, former Cowboy All-Pro receiver, also took the side of Pollard saying, “The hits show that you aren’t intimidated by the other team, that you aren’t going to lay down for them.” Really, all that these type of hits show is that a player is trying to take an opposing player out of the game, which ultimately just shows how much of a coward he is because he can’t beat the opposing team fairly. Also, these hits just show that a player really can’t tackle the right way and that he has to “cheap shot” someone to get him to the ground. I really can't even begin to think how those who encourage illegal hits can justify their position at all.

Not only can illegal hits cause short term injuries, they can potentially be fatal, like in the case of former NFL player, Junior Seau. Seau played many years in the NFL, receiving hard blows to the head constantly. All throughout his career, Seau complained about extremely painful headaches and dizziness, but no one thought much of it. Near the end of his career, Seau started experiencing a more serious symptom, depression. Family members started noticing Seau’s sudden sadness, but didn’t think it was too serious. One night, Seau’s ex-wife received a text from him that simply said “I love you.” The next day, Seau was found at his house…dead. Everyone was shocked because they couldn’t figure out why Seau would ever do such a thing. Doctors studying Seau’s brain soon discovered what had happened. Seau had suffered from CTE, or chronic traumatic encephalopathy, a disease typically caused by multiple hits to the head, which usually leads to extreme depression. People all over the U.S. were astonished by the news, but within a couple years forgot about it and went back to encouraging the dangerous hits.

Dave Duerson, a former Chicago Bear, suffered from the same disease and Seau, and the result was exactly the same. Duerson went into deep depression and eventually ended up taking his own life. The cause of the disease was also the same: multiple hits to the head.

There are those who would argue that what happened to Seau and Duerson was out of the ordinary and that their condition doesn't happen all the time. Well, the truth is that CTE does happen all the time. Over 50 NFL players have been diagnosed with the deadly disease, and those were only the players who donated their bodies to the NFL for research.

Unfortunately, CTE is not the only way that hits to the head can be fatal. Doctors at The Ohio State University discovered that death can very easily be the result of multiple concussions over a short amount of time. You may be thinking, “Well, that’s never going to happen,” but the fact is that it can and does happen way too often. A player can get a concussion from a single hit and continue to play because a sideline trainer clears him to go back in, so the player thinks it's okay. This happened to Brown's quarterback Colt McCoy a few years ago. Later in the game, he could have gotten hit again, resulting in another concussion and ending his life. Just one more hard hit, resulting in back-to-back concussions could have killed him. Thankfully McCoy didn't suffer another hard hit that game. Hopefully, he won't suffer from CTE later in life.

Even if illegal hits don't end a player's life, they can still ruin his future. Doctors have discovered that concussions can cause permanent brain damage. It has also been proven that once a player gets one concussion, he is four times more likely to get another one. This means that a player's whole career may be ruined because he cannot be as aggressive anymore since he is much more likely to get another concussion, which would cause even more brain damage.

Concussions aren't the only way a player's future can be ruined though. Doctors have concluded that just mild head trauma from minor hits to the head can result in long-term cognitive impairment, which in turn could keep a player from getting a decent job after retiring because he cannot think straight. His personal life could also suffer problems because he might not be able to think normally any more.

So what can be done to control these illegal hits? Michelle Teeling, mother of three football players, asks the same question. She suggests that "for younger kids, they should call more penalties for hard hits that are beyond what is necessary to make a tackle; for college players, the offenders should be suspended; and for the pros, there should be large fines. The coaches should also be held accountable because they most likely taught their players to make those hits." I absolutely agree with her suggestions because whether the players are 10 or 25, the hits can still be devastating. That's why actions need to be taken to control them. All in all, illegal hits can ruin a player's whole life and even end it. Neither of those things are worth the excitement the hits bring. The players need to be monitored more closely during tackling, and rules banning excessively hard, illegal hits need to be more strictly enforced.

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