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NEWS FROM THE 11TH DISTRICT

BARRAGA: BRAIN-INJURY SCIENCE YOU CAN'T IGNORE

This is the fourth in a series of articles dealing with the very serious question of brain damage as it applies to those involved in sports where there is serious and repetitive and violent head contact as in football.

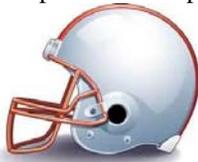
The fourth article in the series is entitled:

BRAIN-INJURY SCIENCE-YOU CAN'T IGNORE

By Lauren Gelman

1. Long-term brain damage from football is well documented.

Numerous studies have linked repeated brain injuries to early - onset Alzheimer's, depression, dementia, and chronic traumatic encephalopathy. A recent *Neurology* study of more than 3,000 former NFL players found that they were three times more likely to die of brain - related diseases such as Alzheimer's and ALS than the general population. Earlier this year, researchers from the Center for Brain Health at the University of Texas at Dallas found that more than 40 percent of ex-players had dementia and depression.



2. High school players take special risks.

Some researchers suspect that exposure to brain trauma early in life may increase the risk of CTE more than exposure later in life. While some one million high school students play football, only 6 percent will go on to play in college, and only 0.08 percent will eventually be drafted to play on an NFL team. But all youths playing tackle football are at risk for concussion and sub concussive brain trauma, regardless of their chances of playing elite football, according to a paper recently published in the *Journal of School Health*.

3. Personal risk factors may play a big role.

While all of those with CTE have a history of brain trauma, not all of those who experience brain trauma develop CTE - a sign that certain people are more susceptible. Among factors under consideration: age at the time of head injuries; genetics and family history; and coexisting health conditions, such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease, known to exacerbate brain damage.

4. CTE symptoms may not show for decades.

Problems with short - term memory, depressed mood, and aggressive behavior usually don't present until years or decades after exposure to repetitive brain trauma, case studies show. And the effects of a particular hit are near impossible to predict. Research shows that the magnitude of a blow is not correlated with odds or severity of concussion.

5. Concussions aren't the whole story.

In fact, many researchers believe that repetitive sub concussive blows - often incurred during practice - play a more important role in the development of CTE. Restrictions on returning to play after concussions, while important, may not minimize long-term brain damage as much as previously thought.