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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**  
**DATE:** December 27, 2012  
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## *NEWS FROM THE 11<sup>TH</sup> DISTRICT*

### **BARRAGA: SHOULD KIDS PLAY FOOTBALL**

This is the fourth in a series of articles dealing with the very serious question of brain concussion as it applies to those involved in sports where there is serious repetitive and violent contact, as in football. As one young father recently said, "In football, you're basically playing a game where people are trying to hurt you." Recently an editorial appeared in Newsday entitled "Young Brains Need Protection" detailing a study by researchers at Boston University which found degenerative brain disease among deceased football and hockey players. Based on the content of this editorial, parents should think long and hard before making the decision to allow their children to play in sports that involve continuous and repetitive head contact

The fourth article in the series is a Newsday editorial entitled "Young Brains Need Protecting"

Evidence of brain damage from repeated head trauma in football and other sports continues to mount, and with it reason for parents and schools to take a hard look at the way children are playing violent contact sports.

A study by researchers at Boston University found evidence of a degenerative brain disease among deceased football and hockey players, boxers and military veterans. Most of the athletes were professionals, but a few played football and hockey only in college or high school.

Brain, the medical journal, just published the study, which looked at 85 subjects with histories of repeated mild brain injuries and found evidence of chronic traumatic encephalopathy in 68 of them, including 64 athletes, 21 military veterans (86 percent of whom were also athletes) and one individual who engaged in self-injurious headbanging behavior.

The study's release happened to coincide with the suicide of Kansas City Chiefs linebacker Jovan Belcher, who shot his girlfriend and then himself Saturday. Nobody know why

Belcher, who played for West Babylon High School, killed Kasandra Perkins and took his own life, or whether he had chronic traumatic encephalopathy. It's difficult, if not impossible, to know what drives anyone to such extreme violence.

But the number of former football players who have committed suicide grows as doctors explore the possibility of a connection with brain damage from their playing days. Recent additions to the list include Junior Seau, a celebrated NFL linebacker who shot himself in May; Dave Duerson, a two-time Super Bowl champion who shot himself in February 2011; Ray Easterling, a former Atlanta Falcons safety who shot himself in April; and O.J. Murdock, a Tennessee Titans receiver who shot himself in July.

And of the 64 athletes in the Boston University study who had chronic traumatic encephalopathy, 50 were football players, including 33 who played in the NFL, one semipro, one from the Canadian Football League, nine college and six high school players. There were also five hockey players and eight boxers. The researchers, for the first time, described four stages of the disease and laid out symptoms that could provide an early warning for concerned relatives, coaches, doctors and others.

Stage one is characterized by headaches and problems with attention and concentration. In stage two, symptoms expand to include depression, explosive behavior and impaired memory. Stage three adds problems with functions such as planning, multitasking and judgment. Stage four is full-blown dementia.

Given growing evidence of the devastating toll the collisions that are an integral part of football can have on players' health, school officials and parents should think long and hard about how the game is played when children suit up. Young players should be taught about the dangers of repeated blows to the head, and the symptoms to look out for when they, or their friends and teammates, take the hits. Reckless contact should be discouraged, not glorified. And players who deliver hits to the head should face consequences.

Leagues should act now to protect young players. Acting after the brain-rattling hits could be tragically too late.