

“Analyzing Concussions in Youth Sports on a Global Scale.”

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Although sports as a whole can bring out good and desired values in people, it also at the same time can highlight issues we have as a society. Whether it has to do with gender, race, class, or a multitude of other political issues, this form of entertainment is not as pure as we would like to think. These problems can be present for many reasons, but a lot of them are ideas that have been present for many years. Such is also the case for the issue of concussions in youth sports, which has been politicized more than one would expect. Concussions on all levels of sport might be the issue where we choose to be the most ignorant as a society, because there is an abundance of science behind making changes, yet not a lot of impactful change is made by decision makers. Concussions are important to look at because of the severity of them. Besides how devastating they are when it first occurs, it is the type of injury that can linger on a person for the rest of their life. They are also especially grave when it comes to youth athletes because at that age, your brain is still developing and physical brain trauma can stunt the growth of it. Another reason it is imperative we look at concussions at the youth level is because it touches almost every competitive sport played. Head injuries don't just occur in physical contact sports like football and hockey, they also have high cases in sports like soccer where the head is used frequently in competition. Knowing that this injury problem is custom to many sports, it is interesting to look at how it holds up on a global scale. Since certain countries have certain sports that are equally popular, many experts compare and contrast. This is something that is done with many sport issues, since ideas on sport and competition vary from culture to culture. Through extensive research and by conducting independent studies, experts continue to try and find how different

countries are performing on awareness of youth concussions and if they are making changes in the right direction.

When looking at youth head injuries specifically, it is impossible to ignore the United States, where high school sports are almost as popular as professional teams in certain areas of the country. And it is impossible to go into American high school sports without bringing up football. It is almost a phenomenon as to how that one sport got so wildly popular for so many people. Unfortunately, with how many participants it draws in, the sport experiences a high rate of concussions and other head injuries. Thomas Rotolo, a sociology expert, wrote extensively on the relevance of concussions in high school football in his well noted piece “Clearing the Cobwebs: An analysis of the Timing of Youth Concussion Legislation in U.S. States” In it, Rotolo looks thoroughly at how concussion awareness has changed at all levels of football, noting how it has been in the media spotlight for decades. Advancements in science as well as numerous professional players speaking out on their head injuries as the years went on made it an impossible issue to ignore. This was important to show because Rotolo then applied his research to that evidence. He looked at multiple states and multiple pieces of legislature to try and find if there was a correlation to how popular football is in a certain state and how responsive that state is in passing safety laws for players on the field. He found that there was in fact a connection. In southern states and other states where high school football is immensely popular, they were way behind other states in passing laws that would improve safety for high school football players in a preventative way. Rotolo stated matter-of-factly that this hesitancy is because less action in the sport and having players sit out with precautionary head injury concerns would have a negative financial impact on state leaders. All things considered, this

essay was meant to show that there is plenty of data on concussions at all levels of football so there is no excuse for not making it more safe for players.

If you are going to compare how other countries are doing with the concussion problem for youth athletes then it would be more beneficial to look at sports that are equivalent in popularity since they have similar numbers of participants, people are opinionated on it, and it is more likely to be deeply researched. A perfect example of this is hockey in Slovakia, where even at a youth level there is a huge following. Hockey is another sport where the game itself lends itself to have head injuries, which in turn provides a good bit of data to analyze and study from. In a team effort, five researchers set out to see how frequent head injuries were at the youth level in Slovakian ice hockey in their article titled “Head Impacts in Youth National Hockey Leagues in Slovakia: a Retrospective Analysis of Four Seasons.” To do their research they tracked head injuries within one hockey league for four years. What they found was that there was a huge increase in the rate of concussions as players got older. They attributed this to overconformity, stating that players get more and more violent to try and win at any cost because of the sports culture. This is the case in many other areas of sport, too. The main thing readers are supposed to take away from this research is that while injury in contact sports is always going to happen, the mindset that performance is more important than playing safely is something that should change.

Because it is established that head injury and concussions are a problem in youth sport, it is a priority to examine how high schools are doing with responsiveness once a player has actually sustained a blow to the head. The return to play from a blow to the head has been progressing for years, and at almost any level of competition is looked at with the utmost urgency. However, if

the prevention of concussions at the youth level is any indication of the treatment, it can be inferred that youth sports are lacking. Four researchers collabed to take on this issue, and did it with comparing countries in mind. In “Prevention of Sports Injuries in Children at School: A Systematic Review of Policies”, the writers looked at multiple high schools in both the United States and the United Kingdom and the preventative measures and rules on injury through reviewing their policies. With just looking at their dealings for after a possible concussion, the experts found some discrepancies. They concluded that while looking at the many schools, the US was better at dealing with head injury scares, but both them and Britain were far from perfect. Schools in the US had certain steps that were incorporated into their plans but had some things missing that the UK did right, and vice versa. In the end, the authors implies that they collectively think both countries should not have anything dissimilar. They even threw in a few things that neither school had implemented into their return to play policies, stating that they think there are certain safety measures that should just be universal.

While league officials can set all the rules they want to prevent or help heal head injuries for youth athletes, only the ones closest to the kids can raise concerns early on: coaches and parents. However, knowing how much we as a society don't treat head injuries with as much importance as we should, it is not hard to guess these adults do not know a lot. Rosemarie Scolarao Moser, a trusted author, dug into this issue by conducting surveys with parents and coaches of youth soccer players in Italy, Israel, and America. It was important she looked at soccer and the countries that she chose because they all have close to the same popularity of soccer as each other. With her research, titled “A Cross-Cultural Examination of Parental Knowledge of Concussion in Three Countries”, Moser found that just like in other studies, the American

parents and coaches were slightly more knowledgeable than those from Italy and Israel, but each country should be doing better. The author explains this is what was expected, and that parents and coaches only show the most concern when a bad head injury has already occurred, and that the injury has happened to their own child.

Just like many other issues, ideas and opinions surrounding concussions in youth sport have all been brought up before by those who study sport in society. For “Clearing the Cobwebs: An analysis of the Timing of Youth Concussion Legislation in U.S. States” the idea of cultural theory is very prevalent. One of the reasons we don’t want to make safe changes to football and other sports is because an abundant amount of people believe catering to injuries no matter how severe is ‘soft.’ In “Head Impacts in Youth National Hockey Leagues in Slovakia: a Retrospective Analysis of Four Seasons” the idea of overconformity is essentially the main idea. Overconformity is when coaches, athletes, or organizations go to extreme measures to try and perform. This was clear in the youth hockey league in Slovakia because as the players got older and they were conforming, concussion rates went up. Teachings of high school athletics administration played out in real life in the article “Prevention of Sports Injuries in Children at School: A Systematic Review of Policies”, when they exemplified how policies differ from school to school.

In conclusion, concussions and other head injuries in youth sports can not be talked about enough. Although the sports world as a whole is moving in the right direction to try and contain concussions, the amount of big, impactful changes have been underwhelming. Through extensive research, it can be determined that the United States is doing better than most other countries in

regards to awareness and change, but we are far from where we should be. To resolve this problem, decision makers should really start to listen to scientific researchers and athletes who are starting to speak out on struggling with head injuries more and more.

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