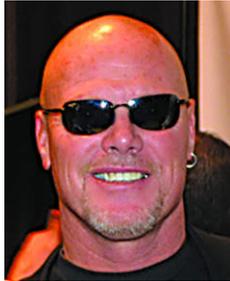


# The Sports Doctor: Football unsafe at any age

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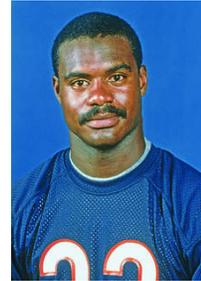
I'm sure most of you have seen last week's Sports Illustrated cover story. I'm really sorry and aggravated to see former Bears great and patient Jim McMahon featured as one of the latest examples of the crisis with concussions. I also worked with the late Dave Duerson whose suicide was attributed to tragic results of multiple brain trauma.



Jim McMahon



Jim McMahon



Dave Duerson | AP

What these former players and their families are going through is brutal! Meanwhile, the game goes on — the mighty NFL insists its doing “all it can” for player safety. Unfortunately the fact remains, football is unsafe at any age.

It's one of the great debates in sports — what can be done about the concussion and head trauma concerns in American football.

We all knew in sports medicine the physical orthopedic toll a collision sport like football involves. The brain injuries, the potential catastrophic consequences of the head hits? That's different! Now that the reality has hit the sport so hard, parents are facing the decision whether to allow their kids to play at any age. The dementia, the suicides, the debilitated players — it's scary.

I have to admit that I've been a fan and am still a fan — Go Bears! — of football but now we know the reality, as presently structured, there is no way to predict and no way to protect the head from this consistent trauma. It's a “crap shoot”; we don't know how many hits, how often, how young causes concern.

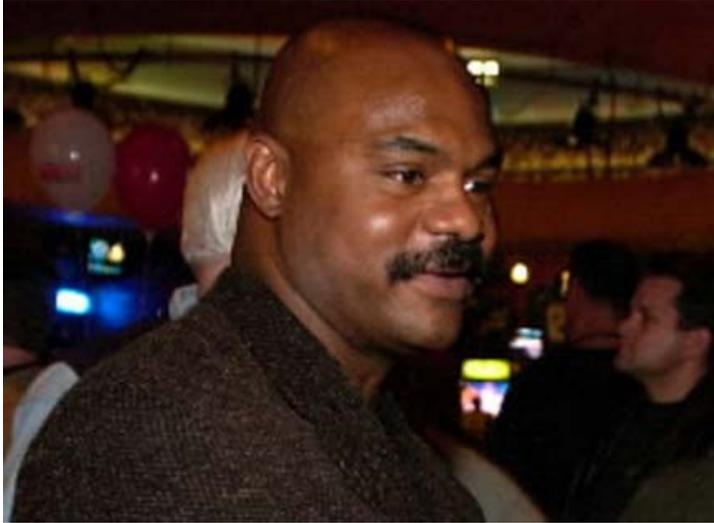
Experts used to think that numerous concussions were the culprit; that those “bell ringing hits” were the concern. Now the reality is no one knows how the “routine” collisions” without getting concussions per se will affect these young players.

The average high school player probably sustains hundreds of head-related micro-trauma per season — how much is too much? No one knows! The powers that be (and they are powerful from the mighty NFL on down) have been dancing around this issue forever. Hundreds of former players are suing the NFL about understating these risks in the past — pundit after football pundit still claims that you can “take the head out of football,” train players to “hit with the shoulders,” and so on.

The helmet was thought to protect — ends up its more like a weapon or makes the player feel indestructible and allows them to “hit like a missile.” The reality is there is no helmet technology that can stop the violent smashing about of the brain inside the skull. If football is to survive, dramatic changes will be needed. Can they go back to leather helmets — when players knew they had to protect their own head? Can we look at Rugby, which is a rough tackle game without helmets?

The incredibly violent hits and collisions have long been “the top of the marketing” (the videos — the John Madden team, etc.) It’s a bummer, but it’s the truth: “football” as we know it is unsafe at any age! Parents — make your decisions wisely!

Dr. Robert Weil is a sports podiatrist from Naperville with an office in Aurora. Hear him on his weekly radio show at 6:30 p.m. Thursdays on 90.9 FM. Contact him at [drweilsportsdoctor@yahoo.com](mailto:drweilsportsdoctor@yahoo.com) and visit [sportsdoctorradio.com](http://sportsdoctorradio.com).



Doctors determined that the brain of former Bear Dave Duerson had "classic" and "moderately advanced" symptoms of Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy, a degenerative brain disease linked to repeated head trauma. | Jon Sall/Sun-Times Media