Growing up, football was very important to me socially and culturally. Whether it was playing pick-up games at school during recess or after school in back yards, I truly loved it. The game was something that connected my friends and I, and some of my best friends to this day I met while playing football. I think that this generation of youth will not get to experience the same connections and love of the game because it has become too violent of a sport. It seems like every day when you turn on the news they air another story about a NFL player being injured. Sometimes they have been retired for decades and they have just started to feel the repercussions of football years later. Judd Legum conducted a study which talks about the large amount of injuries occurring in the NFL this season. Legum cites statistics from the NFL, “According to official statistics released by the NFL, 234 players were dealing with various kinds of injuries heading into the second week of play. This includes 12 concussions, two neck injuries, and one other unspecified injury to the head. There were also 40 knee injuries”. He goes on to state that by the end of the second week of play, in the NFL 15 percent of the NFL was injured (Legum, NP). This means that in 14 days, 250 of the NFLs 1,696 players were injured. This article alone shows the relevance of this problem. Which needs to be recognized and dealt with. Many scholarly articles that I analyzed and researched would agree with that statement.

An article published in the Thomas Jefferson Law Review talks about the many concerns with injuries in the NFL. Rodney K. Smith discusses the topic of traumatic injuries that leads to dementia and diseases of the brain. It tells a great story about how, as a kid, the author was so excited to see
one of his favorite former professional football players. However, once the player gave his speech, he was disappointed. He stated the reason being, “The speaker’s words were slurred and difficult to follow”. He asked his coach what was wrong with the man, and his coach responded saying, “He’s ‘punch drunk’ from all the hits he took as a player” (Smith, 129). These quotes show me that the author is concerned about injuries within the NFL and football. If children keep having experiences similar to his, it will cause them to not want to play football in fear of being seriously injured. I know, from personal experience, that the concern of being injured while playing is real. I quit playing football when I was a junior in high school, in fear of being injured and ruining my wrestling career. The game was just becoming too brutal and I could not consciously put my body in that danger with the way the game is played. I am not the only high school athlete that has quit football because of a belief that the cons outweigh the pros.

A high school in Missouri had to completely shut down their football program due to a lack of interest. An article done by St. Louis Today states, “After two consecutive years of low student interest, the School Board cut the football program at the high school earlier this year. Fewer than a dozen players had signed up for the fall 2015 season. The Missouri State High School Activities Association recommends a minimum of 23 players on the roster” (Fowler, NP). This shows that the popularity is actually on a decline. Parents in the community and members of school administration think “the primary reason Maplewood-Richmond Heights no longer has a football team is that students simply don’t have a love for the game” (Fowler, NP). This is hard to believe that this is the only reason that the kids do not play when it is also proven that “high school players may be at more risk of death than even college or professional football players because still-developing teenage brains are more susceptible to injury, a lack of quality equipment, or inconsistent safety standards” (Fowler, NP). The same article also goes on to say, “Around the country the number of male high school football players has fallen to about 1.08 million players, a significant number but a slight
decrease from previous years, the National Federation of State High School Associations says” (Fowler, NP). This displays that the lack of interest is not only at this school but at the national level as well. Not only do high school students not want to play football anymore, but professional athletes in the NFL are starting to quit as a result of the fear of life long injuries due to football. Jordan Santos wrote in an article on thegoodmenproject.com about the retiring of NFL players at a young age. He said, “Last week, 49ers rookie linebacker Chris Borland retired from the NFL at the young age of 24. Borland justified his early exit from the league by stating, ‘I just honestly want to do what’s best for my health,’ Borland told Outside the Lines. “From what I’ve researched and what I’ve experienced, I don’t think it’s worth the risk” (Santos, NP). Not only was this a young player in the NFL, he was also a rookie. That means, that after putting in years and years of effort to become an NFL player he finally reached his goal and decided that it was not worth it anymore. The game was too dangerous. If kids keep seeing rookies who are just new to the NFL retiring, they may think it “isn’t worth the risk” and lose interest in the sport.

Rules and Regulations need to be put into place in order to make the sport a safer and more enjoyable game for the players. This will cause more people to desire to play the game and give them a chance to experience the benefits that football has to offer. A way the NFL can start to take a step into the right direction is by first looking at what types of injuries have occurred in the NFL and continue to occur in the NFL. I think that they need to take care of their players who are currently playing the game and make it as safe as possible for them. The NFL needs to take care of the retired players that are feeling the aftershock of playing football too dangerously. A great example of how this could be done is if they performed a longitudinal study. One of these studies was done by J.S. Markowitz, G. Papadopoulos, and A. Markowitz the study was published in the Value in Health Journal. They performed a four year long experiment where they gathered data of every player who played in one or more regular season games from 2010 to 2013. They used several reliable online
sources to gather information about the players such as age, height, position, and much more. These sources also kept track of which players were hurt as well as the severity of their injuries. The results of this experiment were, “Data on 3,193 unique NFL players are included in the database. About 7,700 player-seasons are captured that cover nearly 91,000 player-games. About 18,500 Injury Reports are recorded on these players resulting in more than 6,000 missed games. In addition, almost all 959 Injured Reserve List injuries are season-ending and significantly raise the risk of ending a player’s career” (Markowitz, 1). This data shows hard evidence towards the violence and brutality of football. In just four years, almost one thousand people had season ending injuries that risked ending their career. This data only reflects injuries that can be detected right away. There are many undetected injuries that occur in the NFL and football around the world. These injuries can build up towards a much greater health risk in the player’s lives. I believe that the players who have suffered these slow oncoming diseases need to be treated and become advocates for what the sport should become, not what it is. A step in the right direction is learning what effects football can have on a person’s body long after they finish playing.

Aside from all the common knee and shoulder injuries in sports, football can affect one’s brain and make functioning itself difficult. It is said that years and years of blows to the head can lead to, “early onset of Alzheimer’s disease, second impact syndrome, and chronic traumatic encephalopathy” (Hodge, 157). These are serious diseases that can lead to memory loss, loss of bodily function, and even death in some cases. I know about diseases like this from my own personal experience. Right now, my uncle is currently suffering from PST (Progressive Super Nuclear Palsy). He only played football for 8 years. He never played in the NFL, and he never made millions of dollars playing the sport he loved. He only played football in high school and college because of his passion for the game. As a result, he is suffering from this neurodegenerative disease. He currently has no control over the left side of his body, and since it is a progressive disease, he will
continue to lose control over more of his body. Modern medicine, as of now, has no cure for this disease. If nothing changes, he will eventually pass from this illness. Additional research needs to be done in order to help my uncle and others like him to live a healthy and longer life. With today’s advancements in technology and science, we should put effort into understanding these diseases and how they affect people. If we did, we may be able to help cure or null the symptoms.

Research is currently being done on how these traumatic brain injuries affect the body and what can be done to treat the patients suffering from them. Positive results have occurred from this research as well. A study was conducted where they took 100 retired NFL players and evaluated the health of their brains through a number of scans. They were then given various treatment options ranging from, “education on a brain-healthy lifestyle” (Amen, 2) to “brain enhancement supplement[s]” (Amen, 3). The patients underwent this treatment for around twelve months and then came back in for a reevaluation. The results of the reevaluation scans were usually better than the initial scans. They said in their conclusion, “Our findings on this unique population are encouraging as we observed significant improvements in general cognitive functioning, information processing speed, attention and memory in close to half of the participants.” (Amen, 4). This supports my argument that, as long as we keep putting in effort and resources into the fight against head trauma we can solve the problem for people it has impacted. Not only is it important that we find help for people who have suffered brain trauma due to football, it is even more important that we treat it at the source.

People need to become better educated on the dangers of head trauma and what can be done to prevent it. A website dedicated to preventing all types of sports injuries stated,

“How can football injuries be prevented? Have a pre-season health and wellness evaluation, Perform proper warm-up and cool-down routines, Consistently incorporate strength training
and stretching, Hydrate adequately to maintain health and minimize cramps, Stay active during summer break to prepare for return to sports in the fall, Wear properly fitted protective equipment, such as a helmet, pads, and mouth guard, Tackle with the head up and do not lead with the helmet, and Speak with a sports medicine professional or athletic trainer if you have any concerns about football injuries or football injury prevention strategies” (Levine, NP).

These are just some basic tips or rules that are simple to follow and can make a huge difference in the safety and health of the players. Not only does the NFL as an organization need to give players more information on what they can do to prevent injuries from happening, but the new rules and regulations need to be put into place.

An awesome idea for regulations, which should be put into the game, was introduced up by a BYU graduated student Jake Merrell. He came up with the idea of what he calls “Smart Foam”. He goes on to state, “when we put the Exo Nano foam into some of the existing foam in the helmet we can create a smart helmet that will monitor impacts and send that data to the sidelines in real time” (“Smart Foam”, 0:40-0:50). If this became a mandatory regulation for all helmets in football, the game would be changed forever. The trainers could see what part of the head was hit and exactly how much force was behind it. Giving the trainers real data and tools to work with prevents furthering injuries for people who have received a dangerous blow to the head. I believe that, if the football community as a whole works together, we can stop this growing problem in our society. Right now, as our technology and knowledge is growing, we are learning about how, “frightening as the numbers are-estimates of sports relates concussions rage from 1.6 million to 3.8 million annually in the United State” (Carroll, 1). We can stop this. The sooner that everyone realizes the problems at hand and starts working towards solutions, the sooner we can tackle these issues and make football a safer and overall more enjoyable game for everyone.
Work Cited


