

# Letter: NFHS misleads on issue of football, concussions

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To the editor:

A Feb. 6 article circulated by the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) makes a series of unsubstantiated claims regarding injury in high school football. None of the data quoted in this embarrassing article has been carefully vetted for accuracy in, or over time.

We already know that one concussion begets another. The claim — without numbers — is made that repeat concussions are down, yet since the clinical "return to play" protocols keep concussed players from the game for varying periods of time, wouldn't one expect a decline in repeat concussions? Nothing is said about "return to learn," yet we know that some concussed high school players are (in effect) learning disabled for some time, and some perhaps permanently. These studies are incomplete and imperfect, but we are not at liberty to discard what we already know in making prudent decisions about football.

The article speaks of a free NFHS "Concussion in Sports" online education course. I have reviewed a similar presentation seen by parents registering their children for athletics at Mount Greylock Regional High School. The video attempts to "normalize" concussion

as an expected part of athletics, and consistently downplays the risk of football injuries, including the real possibility of chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) and permanent brain damage from repeated concussion. The NFL promoted the same narrative in its sponsored 1990s research program, thankfully abandoned. The term used then was "mild traumatic brain injury" or MTBI.

Pee Wee Football is moving rapidly toward flag football, and so must high schools. At the very least, parents need a choice. Flag football would allow girls to play, reduce costs, and reduce all injury rates from the inherent violence of contact football.

It is argued that football teaches valuable lessons. Schools exist to cultivate minds, not damage them. Is it possible we can keep what is valuable and exclude the violence?

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