

Concussions: sports safer with more knowledge

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"We had our own team doctor and he checked me out; from what I've been told, they did everything they were supposed to," Cason-Barnes said.

California Assembly Bill 2127, which took effect this year, limits the length and frequency of full-contact practices for middle-school and high-school football teams, how concussions are managed and if the player can return the game or not.

College athletes dealing with head injuries and concussions face similar challenges to youths and high school athletes, but at another level.

Ohlone College water polo player Austin Gamble played at both levels.

"I've been playing year-round for five years through high school and college," he said.

According to the head trauma in aquatic sports website, water polo is the water sport with the most head injuries – whether a ball hits a player at a fast speed or a player makes physical contact with another.

During a game against Cabrillo, an opposing player hit Gamble.

"As I was swimming away, the guy's friend grabbed me and kneed me in the eye under water," he said. After Gamble got hit, he started experiencing symptoms of a concussion.

"My coach couldn't see my pupils; my eye was bleeding and I felt like I wanted to throw up," he said.

The National Collegiate Athletic Association guidelines for concussions in college sports help coaches to spot a concussion and develop ways to stop them and prevent complications.

"De Anza's athletic trainer checked me out (after the concussion) and I went to go see Ohlone's athletic trainer," Gamble said.

Steve Griffin is the youngest member of his baseball-crazed family. His passion for baseball led him to play at the college and professional level.

"I went to Fresno State University, where we went to the College World Series," Griffin said. "There was no



ERIKA HEREDIA (ABOVE) AND TAM DUONG JR. / MONITOR FILE PHOTOS

Above: A fight breaks out at a San Jose Sharks home game. Below: A California School for the Deaf player fends off Maryland defenders during a 2013 game in Fremont.

protocol back then; we had drug tests, but it depended where you got drafted if there's a protocol of injury."

Griffin went on to play in the minor leagues for the Southern Oregon A's, Scottsdale A's and Alabama Huntsville Stars. Every sport is competitive, especially minor-league baseball, because a player is trying to move up to the big leagues.

"A lot of players played through their injury to not

lose their spot," Griffin said.

After Super Bowl XLIX, San Francisco 49ers rookie linebacker Chris Borland announced he would end his football career early due to his concern about the long-term effects of concussions.

"I just want to do what's best for my health," Borland said. "From what I've researched and what I've experienced, I don't think it's worth the risk."

Borland isn't the only player to end his career early. Patrick Willis, Jason Worilds and Jake Locker all ended their playing careers this past offseason.

The decision to end a football career early, specifically because of head trauma, can be alarming.

"I respect and support his decision because it was his decision," Roberts said. Football is the sport with the highest concussion rate.

Concussions can affect an athlete on and off the field, and a life after a concussion can mean long-term effects in their daily life.

Former linebacker George Koonce, who played for the Green Bay Packers from 1992 to 1999, and also played for the Seattle Seahawks for one season in 2000, struggles with suicidal depression after football, according to Marquette Magazine.

"Like myself, Junior Seau didn't have any documented concussions," Koonce said during a panel discussion last year at Marquette University in Wisconsin. "But while we may not have had concussions, it's more about that constant head trauma."

When an athlete leaves a sport, it can be difficult to return to normal life, especially if the athlete has suffered several concussions during their career.

"Sport is part of the fabric of our society, but we have to do it safely," Koonce said.

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- AUSTIN GAMBLE



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