

# **Athlete Injury Denial: The Psychology of Sports Injuries:**

Techniques for athletes and coaches to help deal with the mental aspect of an injury, concussion prevention, and proposed legislation to protect High School athletes with respect to head injuries.

Tag Words: Athletes; Injury; Denial; Psychology; Healing Time; Rehabilitation

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## **Summary**

(Cory Haluska)

A sports injury consists of both physical and psychological aspects. Directly dealing with the psychological aspect could potentially shorten the amount of healing time required. An injured athlete typically proceeds through a series of emotions on the way to mental recovery including denial, anger, bargaining, depression/guilt, and then finally acceptance. The quicker an athlete progresses to acceptance than the quicker they can fully focus on the rehabilitation process. It is up to the athletic trainers and coaches to help facilitate this process. If all else fails it would be advisable to seek out the help of a professional to help mediate the process. After returning to action some players are hesitant of reinjuring themselves. If after some time this hesitance does not dissipate then the athlete might be suffering from Sports Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (Sports PTSD). It is up to athletic trainers to properly communicate with their athletes about the situation of their injury and the rehabilitation process; this removes the fear of the unknown and allows for proper mental recovery. Coaches should inform their athletes the dangers of head injuries and prepare drills that avoid head contact as much as possible. Rules have already been put into place limiting the amount of contact practices allowed per week, drastically cutting down on the number of potential head impacts.

## **Video Link**

Psychology of a Sports Injury: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BXDkg6iiB5c>

## Psychology of an injured athlete

(Cory Haluska)

Injuries are a common occurrence in sports due to the physical stress that it places on the body. These injuries could range from being a mild sprain requiring some ice and day-to-day treatment to a major career ending injury. The more severe the injury the longer out of action the injured athlete will be. This extended period out of action could have a major effect on the mental capacities of the injured athlete which is why there is more to an injury than just the physiological aspect. The psychological aspect could have a greater effect on ones recovery time then the physical injury itself. Some athletes even use sports as a way of dealing with things in their personal lives, so when they are dealt with a major injury that will keep them away from action for an extended period of time they do not know how to cope with both their injury and their personal lives. This inability to cope could cause the athlete to drop into a deep depression. Even after recovering from the injury an athlete might still feel the psychological effects if they were not dealt with properly during the athletes rehabilitation.

There are many reasons why the mental aspect is such an integral part to the athlete. While growing up the athlete invests a lot of time and energy into their sport to the point at which they start to associate their identity with their sport. When asked about themselves they refer to themselves as a soccer player or a football player first before mentioning anything else. Being an athlete involves more than just the game but it becomes almost like a way a life, an identity from which personality traits can be drawn from. This is why the loss of an athlete's sport due to a long term injury could have a detrimental effect on their mental capacities. When a player has this negative mentality it could greatly affect the length of recovery time needed to heal from the injury.

The reasons for the negative mentality of an injured athlete are numerous with the most obvious reason being that they will have to spend an extended amount of time away from their sport. This is the equivalent of someone losing a part of themselves, a large portion of their identity has been temporally eliminated which could leave the athlete somewhat lost and depressed. Another major reason is that the injured athlete will have to spend a significant amount of time away from their teammates. Being away from your teammates as an athlete is a hard thing to do since during a season you build strong social connections with them and to not be able to be around them and compete together really hurts on the inside. By not being able to play you feel as if you are letting your team down and what's worse is that you also feel like your letting your teammates down. This mental burden has a major negative effect and could lead to depression which slows down the recovery time.

## The 5 emotional steps of an injured athlete

(Cory Haluska)

There are a series of about 5 emotions that an injured athlete typically goes through when first faced with the idea that they are going to have to miss a significant amount of time away from their sport. An athlete's first major reaction to an injury is typically that of denial. They try to convince their coaches and trainers that they are not really hurt and can continue competing. To admit to an injury is the equivalent as admitting to defeat and defeat is not a word that an athlete likes to be associated with. While others relish the opportunity to play through an injury in order to prove their courage and dedication to the rest of the team. In general though many athletes do

not think that a major injury can happen to them which is why denial is usually the first response since that feel that they are invincible and that nothing bad could happen to them. When faced with a long-term injury or even a career threatening injury players are faced with the grim outlook of being without their sport for a very long time which is why many athletes turn to denial as a way of comfort. It is this first mental road block that must be overcome on the way to both a mental and physical rehabilitation of the injury.

The second emotion an injured athlete normally progresses to is anger. Once they get over the fact that they are indeed injured, the athlete typically gets angry at why this had to have happened to him. They might lash out at other team mates, family members, or even trainers. They turn to anger as a way of coping with their misfortune and they take it out on others around them so that they can make others feel as bad as they do. Not all players experience this step but it would be advantageous to allow the athlete to quickly get their anger out in order to move onto the next stage of psychological recovery from their injury. If the anger persists for an extended period of time professional help should be used.

The third emotional step an injured athlete normally progresses too is that of bargaining or compromising. This is so that they can return to action as quickly as possible. They will try to find way to cut corners on the rehabilitation process or compromise with trainers to allow them to play sooner than they are physically able too. This is an important step for the trainer to recognize because you do not want to allow an athlete to come back too soon from an injury or they will be at risk of reinjuring themselves worse the second time around. An athlete is better off just taking their time coming back the first time to avoid that risk but it is extremely difficult to tell an athlete who is so used to always playing their sport that they are going to have to miss an extra couple of weeks to make sure they are completely healed.

The next emotional step is by far the most important step for a coach or trainer to recognize and help out with. This step incorporates many different emotions but the common theme is depression. After being away from their sport for an extended period of time a feeling of sadness starts creeping in and begins to affect with everyday life. Also the feeling of guilt might also affect the athlete. They feel guilty that they are not able to be on the field to help out with the rest of their team mates. They feel bad that they are just sitting on the sidelines, doing nothing, while the rest of the team is working hard and competing. Depression could also set in from having to watch as someone else takes your spot on the team. If they perform better than you, then you start to fear that you will lose your position on the team once you recovery from your injury; or if they perform worse then you, you feel bad that you are letting your team down because of your injury. An athlete's sport is also usually a source of self-confidence for which they feel completely comfortable and confident on the field. Some athletes lack this presence off the field and rely on their sport to provide them with that satisfaction. Depending on the severity of the injury and the duration of the recovery time it would determine the level of depression an athlete could expect to go through. Of course this is experienced differently by each individual but there is a common theme for life-long athletes to get seriously depressed after being out of their sport for longer than a couple weeks. For an athlete who sustains a career ending injury they are left with a major void in their life that they may not be able to fill, this in turn could result in severe depression. There are some signs that coaches, trainers, or parents should look for to determine if their athlete is going through depression. The most common would be a loss of interest in

things that they once enjoyed which could also include their sport in severe cases. Other symptoms include a change in eating habits or isolation from others. It would be beneficial to identify these symptoms early to avoid progression to a more serious stage of depression which could include thoughts of suicide. The help of professionals might be needed if the athlete is having trouble progressing through depression to the final stage.

The final emotional step an injured athlete typically goes through is that of acceptance. They learn to accept that it's not their fault and begin to focus completely on the rehabilitation process. It is in this step that an athlete has progressed far enough mentally that it no longer has a detrimental effect on the recovery process and in fact it could even help speed up the process. The depression step is the big hurdle that has to be overcome in the process of mental rehabilitation of an injury; once this step has been overcome it then becomes easier to get the athlete to believe in the recovery process. Once the athlete mentally believes in getting better then the trainer could just focus on the physical aspect of the injury instead of dealing with the mental aspect which in some options is worse.

It would be beneficial for an athlete to progress through these stages as quickly as possible in order to help expedite the healing process. To speed up the recovery process the athlete must learn to expect these feelings and not fight or deny them. If the athlete gets hung up on any one of these steps before acceptance then professional help should be sought after. These are the typical steps that an athlete may mentally progress through but they are not set in stone so a step might not be observed at all. It is important for a trainer to deal with both the mental and physical aspects of an injury since the mental aspect has a large control over the recovery time of the physical aspect. So to be effective the trainer must deal with the physical injury itself along with the mental aspect in tandem. This should prove to be the best way to help an injured athlete progress through the rehabilitation process.

#### Self-techniques for coping with injuries

(Cory Haluska)

There are a series of coping techniques that the injured athlete could try in order to help with going through a serious injury. The effectiveness of these self-help techniques are completely up to the participation of the injured athlete, the more they believe in them the better chance they have of getting through the mental aspect and focusing on the physical rehabilitation process. The first and most obvious step would be to feel emotions, be sad, understand what has happened to them and move on to the more important task of healing. It is best to just get all your emotions out about what has happened right away then to sequester them and possibly have a detrimental effect on the healing process later on.

When it comes to the actual healing process it is best to set small incremental goals than to look at the whole task at hand, this keeps the whole process from looking too daunting and demotivating the individual. A rough example would be if an athlete sustains a torn hamstring, the first step would be riding a stationary bike, then walking without pain, and then jogging without pain, finally to be able to practice without pain. When broken up into the smaller steps it does not seem as bad of a challenge and it keeps the athlete motivated to keep striving for the next step. Since each step is of a reachable accomplishment it gives the injured athlete ambition to keep working hard during their rehabilitation. Without the broken down steps the athlete would

have to go from torn hamstring to practicing without pain. This is too broad of a goal and could cause the athlete to feel depressed since its timeline could take a couple months to accomplish while each step of the broken down timeline takes around a week to complete. To be able to accomplish a new goal every week keeps the athlete motivated and focused on the task at hand and could actually help to speed of the recovery time.

Another obvious idea that is incredibly important is to maintain a positive attitude and to be active in your healing process. Being negative will only bring yourself and others around you down while good things always seem to happen when you are positive and the same applies for the rehabilitation process. Your personal attitude can go a long way in determining how much time from competition you will miss, so in the end it does not hurt to be positive. Another good idea is to be active in your healing process, learn about your injury, and listen to what the doctors have to say since they know best how to handle your situation. During rehabilitation work just as hard as you do during practices and show the same determination that you do while you are on the field. Keep your incremental goals in mind and work hard to achieve them. Not only will this appease your own need for competition but it will show your teammates your dedication to the team.

Make sure to stay with the team and continue to practice/workout as much as you are physically able too. If your injury prevents you from physically practicing then continue to attend your team's practices and mentally go through the practice, this keeps your neuromuscular connections activated which will ease your transition back from your injury. Also by regularly attending your team's practices you will prevent yourself from isolating which is a major symptom of depression. It will allow you to remain close with teammates and keep your feeling that you still belong on the team. By doing this you will eliminate many of the symptoms normally associated with depression which will greatly help with the mental aspect of injury rehabilitation.

The next two steps are by far the hardest for an injured athlete to do but are of utmost importance in the mental process of injury rehabilitation. The first step is to seek out a counselor to help deal with the emotional aspect if unable to cope with by yourself. This is hard for an athlete to do since many people will avoid seeking help mainly because they feel like they are admitting defeat. But by admitting defeat and seeking help it actually shows another attribute that athletes like to be associated with and that is courage. By seeking help it'll also have an effect on the physical injury itself which in turn will decrease the amount of time the athlete has to spend away from competition. The other tough self-help step is to be patient and make sure you are completely healed before returning to action. This is a hard one for an athlete to follow since they want to return back to action as quickly as possible but it is beneficial for the athlete to wait until completely healed before coming back that way to avoid a more serious reinjury. This second injury could keep the athlete out of action longer than if they just waited for the first injury to completely heal in the first place. Also when a player comes back to quickly from an injury they are not able to compete at a level at which they did before getting injured over the fact that they are not completely comfortable with how their body feels yet. This could cause the athlete to be more tentative, it is because of this tentatively that athletes are more vulnerable to a reinjury after first coming back. This fear of reinjuring oneself can cause a sense of anxiety that distracts the player from being able to perform on the field to the best of their abilities. This is why it is best for an injured athlete to just be patient and fully heal before coming back because

it's better to come back later at 100% then to come back early at 50% and cause more harm than good for their team.

### Helpful techniques for coaches and trainers

(Cory Haluska)

The psychological pain of having to be away from ones sports could actually be worse than the physical pain of the injury itself. This is why coaches and trainers should have a good idea of how to properly deal with both aspects of an injury to one of their athletes. First it would be a good idea to be sympathetic toward the injured athlete and understand what it is that they are going through. If they are sad then let them get their emotions out, if they are angry then let them get their anger out. The worst thing you want to do is to demand something from someone that just went through a traumatic event such as a major injury. Give them their time and space to come around.

It would be a good idea to give the injured player a new role on the team, that way it keeps them actively engaged with their team and prevent them from isolating themselves from the rest of their teammates. It also gives the player a sense of purpose and keeps them from feeling worthless as they attempt to come back from their injury. Being around the team could also keep the player motivated to want to get back to action as quickly as possible and could help with the symptoms of depression usually associated with major injuries. Expect them practice when they are able to and do not rush them back into action before they are ready. While they are still not able to fully practice, have your injured players go through mental exercises that help keep neuromuscular connections activated so they are ready to compete once cleared to participate again. This mental exercise can also help the athlete progress though the psychological aspect of their injury.

Also as a coach it would be a good idea to keep good contact with the injured athlete even when they are unable to make it to practice. This shows that you are actively taking an interest in your athlete injury and this shows your player that you care for them. This action can go a long way when it comes to the speed of the rehabilitation process if the player knows that they are missed. It could act as a motivation and cause the injured athlete to work that much harder at coming back. If the athlete had to have surgery then visit them at the hospital or give them a call to see how they made out. It is the little things that you do as a coach that can have a major effect on how well your players respond to you. A strong response could motivate your players to want to work hard at rehabilitation to be able to come back as soon as possible. If after all techniques are attempted and your athlete still remains depressed it would be a good idea to send them for professional help immediately.

### Post-injury psychology and faculty improvements

(Cory Haluska)

Following an injury an athlete will more than likely still be hesitant and fear that they will reinjure themselves. Having this fear could become a distraction causing the athlete not to be able to perform as well as they did prior to the injury. This lack of performance could be very stressing to the athlete resulting in anger in oneself and others around them. An athlete's inability to constructively cope with the stress could lead them to depression and a feeling that they might never fully get over the injury. Typically the more they practice and are able to test

their injured area, the more comfortable they will feel and pre-injury performance should once again be obtained. If the fear of reinjure does not diminish and athlete performance remains sub-par then the athlete might be suffering from sports post traumatic stress disorder otherwise known as Sports PTSD. This is a serious condition for which the athlete should seek professional help immediately. Trainers/coaches should be trained in order to pick up on an athlete going through Sports PTSD. Symptoms include anger over lack of performance, stress, constant worrying over reinjure, and change in playing style. A change in playing style signals that the player is shying away from what is normal in order to protect themselves from getting hurt. If a player is exhibiting any of these symptoms following a major injury you should confront the player and discuss options for them to talk with a professional.

In order to be a good trainer they should treat the whole athlete and not just the injury. While the injury is the obvious part, the mental aspect is just as important in regards to treatment as the physical injury itself. Even after the physical injury itself is treated an “emotional scar” could still exist that will affect performance upon returning to competition. The trainer would not be doing their job unless they treat the whole athlete and prevent this “emotional scar” from ever forming. This “emotional scar” just like a physical scar impedes physical activity and causes a decrease in athletic performance. To help with the mental aspect the trainer should properly discuss the injury and rehabilitation process with the athlete. Let them know exactly what they are dealing with along with a good estimation of how much time they are likely to miss. Even though the athlete might not like the news they are receiving, it comforts them to know exactly what they are facing. This eliminates the fear of the unknown. Once the athlete has a firm understanding of what they are dealing with the trainer should sit down with the player and discuss proper intermediate goals and set appropriate timelines of when these goals should be completed.

In order for a trainer to provide care for the mental aspect of a sports injury they should have a good working knowledge of psychology and strong communication skill along with their knowledge of the workings of the human body. Most schools degree programs require general psychology for an exercise science degree but no communication courses or a course dealing specifically with sports psychology. There are a couple courses dealing with sports psychology at some colleges but it is not a universal thing. Mandating courses dealing specifically with sports psychology and communication could prove to be beneficial when these students deal with athletes in the future.

Many high school athletic facilities lack the necessary faculty and equipment to adequately deal with the multitude of injuries they have to deal with. Smaller schools typically only have one or two trainers and old equipment due to lack of funds. Increased funding is needed to significantly upgrade their used equipment, plus only having one trainer is difficult since they cannot be in more than one place at a time. More focus should be placed on improving high school athletic programs and upgrading their facilities because children at those ages are still developing and are most vulnerable to the mental aspect of a sports injury since they cannot fully grasp the reality of their situation. At those ages their major concern is returning to competition as soon as possible without regard for the long term ramifications they might face. It would be advantageous to provide high school athletes with access to a sports psychologist so they would be fully aware of their situation and the consequences of their actions. Above the high school level, faculty and facilities are of typically greater quality as they have greater assets in which to acquire the necessary equipment and professionals to help with their athletes. While having these resources available to college level programs are important it

should also be made a priority to extend these resources down to the high school level since injury prevention includes dealing with both the psychological and physiological attributes.

### Concussions

(Manny Abreu)

The brain is the most sensitive part of the human body located at the very top surrounded by a thick skull with cerebrospinal fluid to protect it. Although it has a thick skull to protect it and having it sit in cerebrospinal fluid the brain can still be reached which brings me to the word concussion. A concussion may result when the head hits an object or a moving object strikes the head. A concussion can happen in many different ways such as a sport activity, football, hockey, boxing, rugby and many more. Another way that a concussion can occur is by a car accident, a fall, a sudden head movement, and or any object hitting the head directly. Symptoms of a concussion can be from a simply headache to lose of memory, dizziness, loss of time, date, time, drowsy, lights can be bothering to the person, walking problems, uneven pupils, muscle weakness, easily upset, and confused. All these things can occur to the person that has experienced a concussion. There are many levels of a concussion which will vary some of these symptoms I mentioned but never the less a concussions is something anyone would want to experience because it not a good sign. the brain like I said is very sensitive and with a hit to the head with the movement of this force the brain can move within the skull that is protecting it and press against the its very own skull and cause a head injury. When experiencing a blow to the head there is always a coup which is the initial direction of the impact and a countercoup which is the other end of where the pressure is coming from. This means that the brain could not hold its ground and the brain will then press against the skull. The cerebrospinal fluid holds the brain with in the skull which serves much more as a soft pillow that can prevent from a concussion to happen but I the force of the blow or activity is to great then the cerebrospinal fluid or the pillow with I just stated will not be any help because it will smash against the skull and cause many of the symptoms that I explain before. The brain swells up from the impact that was just taken and applies pressure to the brain stem which controls the breathing and many other functions of the human body. Most concussions come from sport activities due to the aggressive play by the players and the competitiveness with in all who plays. Being the best is what a player seeks and nothing will stop him/her from doing everything they can to do so. Unfortunately this way of thinking is not the best way to think when experiencing or have experienced a concussion. A concussion is very serious and if it isn't handled with the correct timing, people, and care the person suffering this concussion will be experiencing much more than just a headache or sort term memory loss or even difficulty walking, this person will have much more dangers ahead of them.

### Concussion Prevention

(Manny Abreu)

In which bring me to the point of how kids are being taught how to practice their sport the correct way. Are their coaches doing the right things by telling the players how to play the game and how to protect themselves from getting a concussion in any level? Having a plan is the best way to handle a situation as strong as to a concussion. Being prepared for the worst and hoping for the best is how I believe coaches should think. Knowing exactly what is going on while experiencing a concussion and trying to feel what the player feels would be a good start. Having some time of understanding will have the player that is experiencing the concussion at

ease and won't have the player going under more than what he/she already is. But not only coaches but trainers, parents and most of all the players themselves to know how a concussion works because the more people around you know about concussion the better it is for the team or activity. Prevention is number one; as long as you know how to prevent a concussion then you have a chance on limiting the chances of it actually coming your way. But let's be realistic even though you know exactly how things work with a concussion doesn't mean that you will prevent everyone but it will bring the percentage of concussions down by a large amount. Second step would be to have classes with coaches, trainers, parents and players so that they are all on the same page and know what exactly are going on. Players need to know what a concussion is because most players that experience a concussion for the first time don't know what it is and what exactly is happening to them. Players that have not experienced a concussion or have not been spoken too or taught the matters of a what a concussion is will think that the dizziness or confusion is mild or will go away just like a small headache would on a regular basis. The player will then continue playing their sport or activity and not talk to anyone about what the just experienced in which in this case is not a positive note because then players that has just occurred a concussion will be more at risk than any other player on the field of play. Although there is only a small ten (10%) percent of athletes in the United States experience a concussion during a season at the high school level but with the chances doubling for a second concussion it doesn't look good for the players that experience it or that will experience it. At the high school level 38% of head injuries come from football players that have made notice to someone about their injury. What about those that have not spoken out about their head injury not only just their first concussion but their second and their third or even fourth? A concussion can and will leave its mark on many athletes around the world, some that will just keep playing and never feel the difference in what their concussion has done to them and many others that have difficulties in doing their daily duties. As a football player, I myself have experienced a few concussions and it's not something anyone would like to see. Having a background of how a concussion works and how to prevent it really helps me in many ways and others as well. Talking to trainers and my coaches about how a concussion works helped me a lot and what has impacted me most was the simple fact that I felt safe going out to the field of play. Talking together as a unit will help everyone understand what and how things work with concussions and it will give more confidence to the actual player.

Talking about it and understanding it all is one thing but next comes how to actually prevent a concussion within the drills and way of playing the game. If using your head in a sport a player should always use protective gear to lower the risk of a head injury of any other injury. Looking back at my high school days I remember that we would be involved in some brutal drills that would hurt and turn you into what was called then a "man". Drills need to be taught the right way and some need to be excluded due to injury. The proper way of hitting in football or in any sport that requires using your head to strike with would be to have your head tucked within your shoulders which would make you look like a turtle and then seeing exactly what you hit with your two eyes so that you can prevent numerous injuries to happen. This technique will prevent from a spinal injury, and it will lower the risk of a concussion. Things do happen and you won't always be in this position all the time but that is why we practice and teach. The smarter the players are the safer they will be and the less of a risk they will be in. Having experienced a concussion before learning this technique and now that I know how to use it and when to use it, it has made me a safer player and it has given me more confidence to go out there on the field of play and not have to worry about the concussions that I have had in the past. I was

also taught that you don't have to use your head all the times. Trying to use your hands to prevent from getting hit a certain way will help, and also to try to use more of your shoulders to absorb the impact along next to your head. Avoiding the hit is better than getting taking on the hit at full force. Knowing when to position yourself with these techniques is very useful for those that deal with a hit impact sport. Using other parts of your body to prevent from taking in all the hit will help prevent the risk of getting hurt and most of all receiving a concussion. At the high school level the numbers of concussions are increasing and whatever could be done to prevent from these kids from getting a concussion will only be better for them.

### Rules Regarding Concussions

(Manny Abreu)

In the past few years the NCAA has given their focus on big time hits and the protection of those on the other end of those big hits. Protecting defenseless players and making sure that if a defenseless player was hit that the player in the act of hitting the player would pay the consequences for it. Hits are now being looked over even after the game takes place just in case the referee didn't notice a dangerous hit to another player. The game was always played aggressively but things have changed for the better because too many players are suffering long time affects and what for a game that can also be played safety and with the proper technique. Using the crown of your head which is the very tip of your forehead when used on someone else with speed and force can hurt another player severely or even themselves. When a player is in the air another player cannot hit them while in the air because the player can't defend himself against the hit. Once a defender leaves his feet and springs out like a rocket that player has become a dangerous hitter and can lead to harming a player. After the NCAA placing some of these new rules the NFL then looked at what the collegiate level is doing to prevent concussions and any other injuries and they also took matters in to their own hands and are now fining players for dangerous hits that can hurt another player severely. If these two big leagues are taking action then I believe that the high school levels should do the same. The more we teach and show the youth how to play the sport aggressive but yet still safe then the less concussions and major injuries will occur. The NCAA isn't stopping their because every year the NCAA is coming up with more rules to prevent concussions to keep spreading by taking out major ways of a player to be placed at a high risk concussions situation. The wedge on kickoff has been reduced to only two players not four like recent years. Most knock out concussions would take place in this section of football games, and although the fans loved it the payers didn't feel that excitement when at least two players would be on the ground no knowing what's going on because they both have lost conciseness. The newest rule change from the NCAA has been that during the spring there will be four days of noncontact instead of three. During the season football practices will only be allowed two full contact practices. This will lessen the number of hits they take during a practice week. Studies have shown that players are hit more during practice then they are in games. I agree to this study because I can say that practice is ten times harder than an entire game. During a practice week you can play the game four or five times before the game actually starts. Shortening full contact practices will give the body and brain much more time to recuperate from past games and practices. "Because of the seriousness of the potential consequences, the presidents determined the league needed to take proactive steps in protecting the welfare of our student-athletes," said Robin Harris, the executive director of the Ivy League. It's a major concern that the athletes are protected and that steps are taken to make sure that they are in all levels. The NCAA is not going to stop at the football level but they will

go back and review all the sports and change anything that leads to concussions. Reducing concussions is what they are going to do and I agree with all that they are doing. A concussion slows you down in many ways and I won't want anyone to come across a concussion because it's not the best experience in the world but with the help of the NCAA the world of sports is changing for the better. Now if only the high school level can do the same. Enforce that the rules change and implement new strategies like the NCAA is taking and be proactive in solving this problem from the start. Shifting the movement to the high school level will be the best thing for everyone. Training the youth how to better take care of themselves during a physical game will be best in the long run due to the fact that they will already have those habits of protecting themselves once they enter the Ivy leagues and pro sports if ever given the opportunity.

On the positive note our governor has already taken action and has passed a law that will prevent from players to keep playing after receiving a concussion or if they have any signs of a concussion the coach has to remove the player from the game of play until a doctor gives him the right of go to compete again. One state has taken action now for the rest of the states to follow the light that Governor Christie sees and to a better future for all. The governor's mission is to have the young players protect themselves during the game and that it's about them not getting hurt. It's not that they aren't tough or that they can play the game it's all about the safety of the young players and all players that are in a physical sport all around the country. From movement to movement and people speaking out about this problem then we will all see that it's a problem and that better safety precautions need to be taken to insure that in any physical sport the players are safe. It's a physical sport and things will happen no matter how much you try to protect yourself during the game some will get hit the wrong way that's not a doubt in my mind, but once that player is taken care of and given proper treatment to recover from the concussion then the player could be allowed to reenter the game. This doesn't mean that the player can sit out a few minutes and he or she is all better. The player suffering the concussion or who is showing signs of a concussion will have to sit out until a doctor has looked over the players and has made sure that he/she is in good conditions to play. Now this could mean that the player can miss a week maybe two weeks just as long as the player that received the concussion is better and the risk of getting a second concussion won't be as high as it would be if the player would to go in right after a water break.

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### **The Service Project: Legislative Addition**

(Cory Haluska)

Our service project is aimed at passing legislative to protect players from the lasting effects of multiple concussions. During the beginning of 2010 the governing body of New Jersey high school sports, the New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association (NJSIAA) put forward guidelines on how to handle athletes that sustain a head injury. These guidelines were not set in stone until the end of 2010 when Governor Chris Christie signed them into law (Assembly, No. 2. Among the new law it states that athletes that are suspected of having a concussion are to be immediately removed from competition and are not allowed to return to athletic activity until examined by a concussion specialist.

*A student-athlete who sustains or is suspected of having sustained a concussion or other brain injury while engaged in a sports competition or practice shall be immediately removed from the sports competition or practice in accordance with the school district's written policy. A student-athlete who is removed from competition or practice shall not participate in further sports activity until he is evaluated by a physician trained in the evaluation and management of concussions, and receives written clearance from that physician to return to competition or practice.*

NJSIAA recommends that the athlete must be symptom free for a week before returning to action. The new law also calls for each school district to write their own policy regarding prevention and treatment of concussions, this policy must then be approved by the department of education.

*Each school district shall develop and implement, by the 2011-2012 school year, a written policy concerning the prevention and treatment of sports-related concussions and other brain injuries among student-athletes. The policy shall include, but need not be*

*limited to, the procedure to be followed when it is suspected that a student-athlete has sustained a concussion or other brain injury.*

All school physicians, coaches, and trainers must then complete an interscholastic athletic head injury safety program that discusses concussion warning signs and the rehabilitation process to returning back to action. The last item discussed in the new bill is that athletic trainers must complete 24 credits of continuing education on the topic of concussion related issues in order for license renewal. This is a very important law since more than 400,000 concussions occur at the high school level each year.

While this may be an important piece of legislation it is missing an important part that must not be overlooked and that is the case of multiple concussions. Concussions are an additive injury in which the effects of one concussion are made worse if the athlete has received a previous concussion. What makes matters worse is that once an athlete sustains one concussion they have a two to three times greater chance of sustaining another concussion. Sustaining multiple concussions can lead to serious consequences such as memory loss, impaired cognitive abilities such as lower test scores, recurring headaches, and increased chance of Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease. It is recommended that an athlete who receives multiple concussions remain out of action for up to a year to be able to fully recover before returning to competition. This should give the brain an adequate amount of time to recover before being subjugated again to the physical nature of their sport. It would be hard to pass a rule requiring that an athlete who sustains a second concussion must remain out of action for at least a year. This proposed law would meet much criticism from legislators, coaches, and players. A more realistic rule change that I would like to propose in addition to Governor Christie's legislation would be if an athlete sustains a second concussion upon returning from a first concussion than they should be required to miss the remainder of the season regardless of being able to pass the concussion test. If a third concussion is sustained within a year of the first one then said player will be required to be out of action for at least one year. One concussion is bad enough but to sustain two or more in the same season could be detrimental to the future health of the athlete. This is why we are proposing an amendment to the recently passed legislation in a letter sent to Sen. Richard Codey who sponsored the legislation, NJSIAA, and Governor Chris Christie.

Letter Sent to legislators  
(Cory Haluska)  
To whom it may concern,

We are Rutgers students who have recently completed a project dealing with the psychological issues of a sports injury. Unfortunately injuries are a frequent occurrence in sports. Depending on the severity the injury it could keep the athlete out of action anywhere from one day to the rest of their life. An athlete who is force out of competition for an extended period of time faces a series of emotions including denial, anger, bargaining, depression/guilt, and finally acceptance. Progression though each emotional stage signals that an athlete is mentally as well as physically recovering from the trauma known as a sports injury. Athletic trainers should be educated in how to handle both the physical and mental aspects of an athlete's injury, this way they can best facilitate the recovery process. In order to do this an athletic trainer especially at the high school level should be knowledgeable in the psychology of an athlete and possess strong communication skills to clearly dictate to the athlete their situation and

the steps to be taken to get them back onto the field. This is why we feel that courses dealing with communication and athlete psychology should become a mandatory part of an exercise science degree.

In regards to the recently passed legislation creating concussion awareness and prevention program we feel that there is an important piece that was left off of the original legislation. This is in regards to athletes who sustain multiple concussions. Concussions are an additive injury in which the effects of one concussion are made worse if the athlete has received a previous concussion. What makes matters worse is that once an athlete sustains one concussion they have a two to three times greater chance of sustaining another concussion. Sustaining multiple concussions can lead to serious consequences such as memory loss, impaired cognitive abilities such as lower test scores, recurring headaches, and increased chance of Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease. A rule change that we would like to propose would be that if an athlete sustains a second concussion upon returning from a first concussion than they should be required to miss the remainder of the season regardless of being able to pass the concussion test. If a third concussion is sustained within one year of the first one then said player will be required to be out of action for at least one year. One concussion is bad enough but to sustain two or more in the same season could be detrimental to the future health of the athlete.

Thank you so much for your time

Letter Sent to NJSIAA

(Manny Abreu)

Dear NJSIAA,

I am writing to you to about a few concerns that I have that deal with your rules and regulations on concussions and the prevention tactics. I am a student athlete at Rutgers University and I have experienced a few concussions during my career and I would like to address to you that the high school level is on my mind. Concussions are very serious and can lead to many future difficulties to those that have experienced a concussion. Having the opportunity to be part of the NCAA and the tremendous changes to help prevent major concussions throughout their league has brought my focus over to high sports and its prevention steps to limit concussions. The game is changing and so should ways of going by injuries and the health of the players. Governor Christie has just passed a law that helps those that received a concussion or has signs of a concussion. The player will not be able to play until he/she is checked by a doctor. I strongly agree with his statements about this new law on having savers players and healthier futures. If you could open your hearts and see that by teaching the youth on concussions work and implementing new rules for coaches and the league. Thank you for your time and I hope this message touches your heart, mind and soul.

## **Editorials**

Cory Haluska

*Sent to Burlington County Times (7/26/11)*

Injuries are unfortunately a frequent occurrence in sports. There are two major aspects to an injury, physiological and psychological. Trainers and coaches typically focus only on the physical aspect of the injury without much regard for the mental aspect. This is unwise since by addressing the psychology of the injured athlete you could potentially cut down their recovery time. The reason for this importance is because an athlete that sustains a major injury typically goes through a series of emotions on their way to recovery. Denial is usually first followed by anger, bargaining, depression/guilt, and finally acceptance. The quicker that an athlete proceeds through this series to acceptance than the quicker they are mentally ready for the rehabilitation process. It is only when a player gets caught at any of the steps is it advantageous to seek out a professional to help mediate the athlete through the remaining stages.

Many upper level athletic programs have the necessary equipment and faculty to adequately deal with both aspects of a sports injury but in contrast a majority of high school programs do not have the necessary resources, whether that is not enough trainers or out of date equipment. In order to deal with the psychological aspect it would be advantageous to provide high school athletes with access to a sports psychologist so they would be fully aware of their situation especially since at those ages their major concern is returning to competition as soon as possible without regard for the long term mental and physical ramifications. Increased funding is needed to significantly upgrade the school's athletic facilities and to be able to provide their students the proper services they require to succeed both on and off the field.