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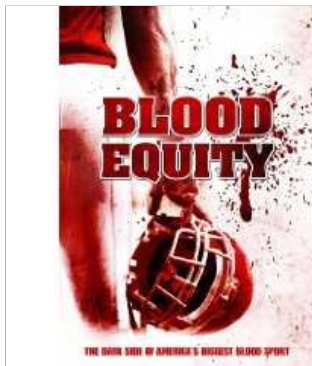
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A sobering, unflattering look at the NFL

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CALIFORNIA -- The frequency and severity of on-field concussions have reached plague proportions in college and pro football, with star players being required to leave and sit out games at a rate previously unknown.

Because of this, the polemical documentary, *Blood Equity* couldn't have arrived at a more appropriate time. The film's primary concern is with the treatment of players after they've served their purpose to the NFL, but it's impossible not see the parallels with today's generation of gladiators.

They're as clear as the highlight reels that feature impossibly powerful collisions and the sight of players being carted off the field, with crowds genuflecting before the video replays on the Jumbotron.

The problem, of course, is that historically rich and greedy team owners don't want to provide costly long-term care to veterans, while union leaders serve only the players currently paying dues.

Among the players who've succumbed to debilitating health problems are Hall of Famers John Mackey and the late Mike Webster. Their stories are heart-breaking.

Also offering testimony are such former All-Pros as Harry Carson, Mike Ditka, Daryl Johnston, Donnie Green and Willie Wood.

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Much of the venom here is reserved for the former head of the NFL Players Association, Gene Upshaw, who appeared to lack any sympathy for the plight of his contemporaries.

He died during post-production, though, and his absence leaves a gaping hole at the core of director Michael Felix and ex-NFL linebacker/coach Roman Phifer's film.

Anyone who could watch *Blood Equity* back-to-back with a bowl or title game, and not be profoundly moved, either is lacking a heart or a brain.

Of course, this could describe 90 percent of all football and broadcast executives who promote the punishment but refuse to pay the toll for the game's stars' well-being.

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Gary Dretzka is a columnist for Movie City News.

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