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## Increasing Awareness of Brain Injury in the NFL

### National Football League Criticized for Denial of TBI Link

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**Nov 15, 2009**

The NFL has long denied there is any link between football and brain injury or cognitive deficits later in life. A study commissioned by the NFL itself disputes that.



On the same day *The Blind Side*, an inspirational rags-to-riches movie about Baltimore Ravens tackle Michael Oher, is released, a different subject is tackled in the documentary, *Blood Equity*. *Blood Equity* looks at how the NFL Player's Union treats its players after their retirement from the game. Some live in poverty while some end up in long term care facilities due to Alzheimer's or other memory-related illnesses.

#### Former New England Patriot Makes Documentary

Roman Phifer, former NFL player, three time Superbowl Champion, and current Denver Broncos assistant coach was instrumental in getting *Blood Equity* made. The purpose of the film, according to the website, "is to educate and seek solutions for improving life for many of these men after playing in one of the world's most violent games." Partial proceeds from the film will go to the [Gridiron Greats Foundation](#).

#### Link Between Football and Brain Injuries

The long term effects of the bruising game of football on player's health has recently been discussed in congressional hearings.

In the New York Times, October 28, 2009, *N.F.L. Scolded Over Injuries to Its Players*, Alan Schwarz reported that the National Football League was accused in front of the House Judiciary Committee of "neglect in its handling of active and retired players with [brain injuries](#)." He also reported there is mounting evidence of a link between playing football and cognitive impairment, such as dementia later in life.

Representative John Conyers Jr said there should be federal scrutiny of football, particularly because the impact of injuries on "the millions of players at the college, high school and youth levels."

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#### Facts About Traumatic Brain Injury

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 1.4 million Americans receive treatment for traumatic brain injury (TBI) each year and 50,000 of these result in death.

Most sports injuries are mild and do not result in treatment but there are an estimated total of 1.6 - 3.8 million brain injuries in sports each year. The CDC reports that 'repeated mild TBI's occurring over an extended period of time (i.e., months, years) can result in cumulative neurological and cognitive deficits. Repeated mild TBI's occurring within a short period of time (i.e., hours, days, weeks) can be catastrophic or fatal."

Currently over 5 million people in the United States require long-term or lifetime assistance as a result of deficits from a TBI. These are the type of injuries incurred by football players over time resulting in the concern about the health and well-being of NFL players after their playing career is over.

#### NFL a Multi-Billion Dollar Entity Must Provide Assistance

The NFL may now start to take the long term health of their players more seriously after a study they

commissioned was released. In an article titled, *Dementia Risk Seen in Players in N.F.L. Study*, in the New York Times, September 29, 2009, Alan Schwarz reported that "Alzheimer's disease or similar memory-related diseases appear to have been diagnosed in the league's former players vastly more often than in the national population - including a rate of 19 times the normal rate for men ages 30 through 49."

The growing awareness about brain injury, dementia and Alzheimer's as it pertains to playing in the NFL gives hope to many ex-players that help might be on the way. And perhaps a better assistance program will be in place for the players of today when their playing days are done - despite perception, most NFL players are not making millions.

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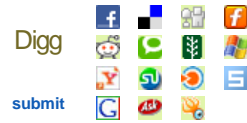
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Guest : Nov 23, 2009 11:50 AM

It's good to see TBI getting more attention. I had a TBI several years ago and have had daily headaches (from mild to severe) ever since -- a problem, given that I make my living as a writer and editor. As my personal injury lawsuit drew to a close, a doctor on the defense side said that athletes sustain head injuries all the time and don't suffer any long-term damage. I doubted that then, and this gives me all the more reason to doubt it. Just because something isn't being diagnosed doesn't mean it doesn't exist -- and for people who've experience TBI and it's long-term effects, believe me, it exists.

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