

Head Knocks - Transcript

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INTRO: Getting to the top in sport can sometimes mean putting your body on the line. But is our desire to win so strong that we're prepared to put our health at risk? Well, quite often the answer is yes. Kirsty reports on some changes that have been made in professional sport around how we deal with head injuries.

KIRSTY BENNETT, REPORTER: No pain. No gain.

COMMENTATOR: Crack bang.

KIRSTY: That seems to be the motto of many elite sports stars. But in this battle for a win you might see some players walk off like this.

COMMENTATOR: He'll get up and head off in the wrong direction.

KIRSTY: Dizzy, blurred vision, confused and sick, these are some of the signs of a concussion. They can happen a lot in contact sports like boxing, footy and rugby. So how does someone get a concussion?

To find that out let's look at this model of the human brain. It sits in the skull in a liquid that's kind of like saltwater so it floats and can move around. So if you collide with someone or something with your head the brain can bounce against the front and back of the skull, which can cause bruising.

A concussion can make small tears in the nerves that can stop the messages flowing around the brain. So messages from the eyes and so on are disturbed that's why people get blurry vision and lose balance. A concussion can be serious but research has found that players don't even need to get a concussion to damage the brain. To better explain it, let's visit the US.

American footballers have their fair share of head knocks. It's estimated that NFL players get around 1500 hits to the head every season. These knocks don't always lead to a concussion but US researchers have found that they can all add up to health problems when players are older.

RON MURATORE, NRL MEDICAL BOARD: Long term we do know that people with multiple head injuries do have problems with depression, increased incidence of suicide and dementia.

KIRSTY: The NFL is now spending a lot of money looking into how hits affect players during and after their careers. But the US isn't the only country that's looking closely at the effect of its contact sports. Australia is also in this debate.

New guidelines have been brought in to deal with concussions in Aussie rules, rugby and league. While they aren't hard rules, clubs have agreed to some changes, like checking players' brains at the start of each season, so they can detect if there are any problems. And if a player gets concussed in a game, it's recommended that they don't go back on. But that's already been causing controversy this season, with some players upset at being forced off the field.

COACH: Push it through. Good work.

KIRSTY: Some local football teams have been getting the safety message in early by making players wear protective head gear. Many think it's a good move because there's no doubt they work. But some people think head protection could make things even worse. There's a view that wearing it gives players a false sense of safety and makes them play even rougher. In American football the helmets are so strong that players now use them like a weapon to batter the opposition.

Aussie sports are still working out the best way to deal with the issue. But for sports stars who want to win at all costs research is now able to show them that risking your health could be a high price to pay.

Head Knocks - Homework Questions

1. What are some symptoms of concussion?
2. Give an example of a contact sport.
3. In your own words, describe what happens to the brain when someone gets concussed.
4. It's estimated that NFL players get about how many hits to the head every season
 - a. 100
 - b. 500
 - c. 1500
5. What sort of problems can repeated head injuries cause later in life?
6. What changes are being made to some Aussie contact sports?
7. Complete the following sentence: If a player gets concussed in a game, it's recommended they...
8. What are some local football clubs being doing about the problem?
9. Why do some people think wearing head protection could make things worse?
10. Do you think wearing head protection should be compulsory for all contact sports? Explain your answer.