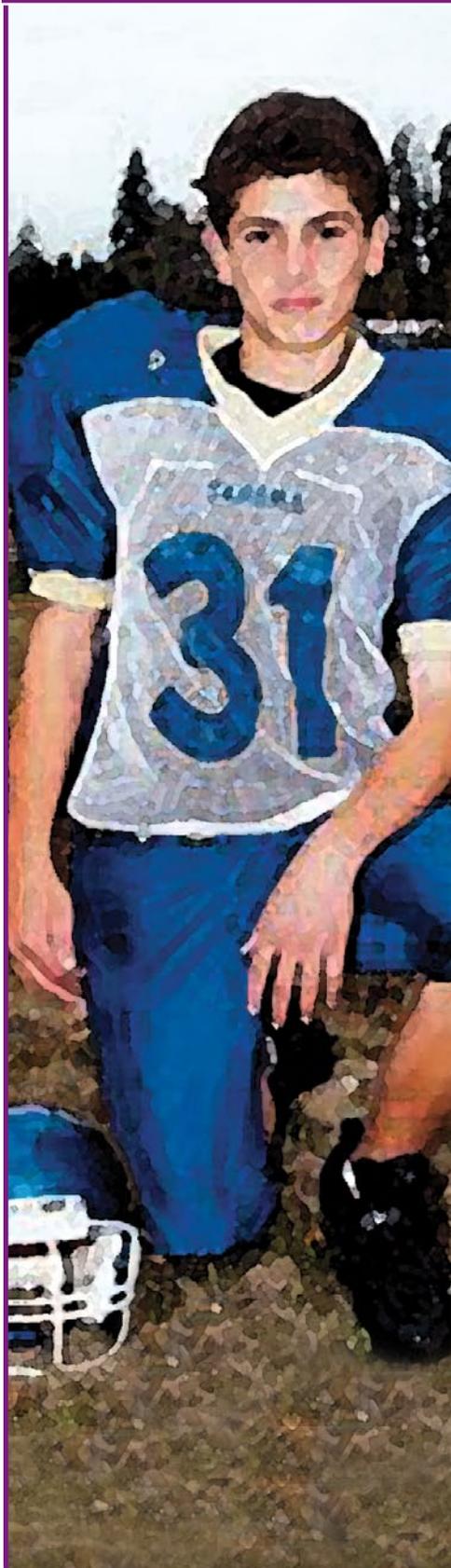


Traumatic Brain Injury in Sports: A Father's Story



Returning to play too soon can keep your child out of the game.

“He was injured when he tackled another player and hit the back of his head on the playing field,” Victor Lystedt recalled about his son Zack’s last junior high football game.

In the first quarter of play, the game official signaled a time out on the field in accordance to the league rule after Zack’s hit, and Zack exited the field before the end of the quarter. Zack, 13 years old at the time, returned to play in the second half.

“He always wanted to be part of the play,” his father recalled. A star player, Zack played both offense and defense on the team.

His father noticed that during the fourth quarter Zack made a lot of contact with other players. By the end of the game, his father walked out onto the field to find Zack unable to stand.

“He didn’t pass out right away, but he did grab his head and he rocked back-and-forth in pain. I went out to the field to see how he was doing”, Lystedt remembered.

“Another parent and I carried him off the field,” he recounted.

Emergency responders airlifted Zack to Harborview Medical Center, a nearby Level I trauma center.

Zack sustained a traumatic brain injury (TBI).

A TBI, including concussion, is caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head. A TBI can also occur from a fall or a blow to the body that causes the head and brain to move quickly back and forth. Even a “ding,” “getting your bell rung,” or what seems to be a mild bump or blow to the head can be serious.

“I never knew how serious it could be. I want the message to get out there. [Parents] need to know what to look for and that it can be a life-changing event.”

— Victor Lystedt
Zack’s Father

Many athletes accept the risk of injury in sports as one of their many challenges. However, there are unacceptable risks, especially when it comes to the brain. Consequently, Zack's return to the game too soon after being injured changed his life forever.

After he underwent emergency life-saving surgery to remove the left and right side of his skull to relieve the pressure from his injured and swelling brain, he experienced numerous strokes. He spent seven days on a ventilator and three months in a coma before he awoke to his parents and a new reality.

Prematurely returning to the game had resulted in the battle for Zack's young life, including four weeks in a nursing home, two months in a children's hospital for rehabilitation, nine months before he spoke his first word, 13 months before he moved a leg or an arm, and 20 months on a feeding tube. It would be nearly three years before Zack would stand, with assistance, on his own two feet.

Zack's parents learned about the seriousness of TBI after their son had already sustained one.

Lystedt realized, "Before Zack's injury, I had heard of concussion, but never thought about it in this magnitude. I didn't know the long-term effects or what to do. I never knew how serious it could be. I want the message to get out there."

The key to a child's safety is to prevent, recognize, and respond to TBIs, including concussions, appropriately. The fact is that while the brain is still healing, it is more likely to sustain a second TBI. Repeat or later brain injuries can cause permanent brain damage, and even death in rare cases.

"I never knew how serious it could be. I want to get the message out there. [Parents] need to know what to look for and that it can be a life-changing event," Lystedt acknowledged.

Learn how to prevent, recognize, and respond to TBIs, including concussions, at: www.cdc.gov/traumaticbraininjury.



TBIs, including concussions, can happen to any athlete—male or female—in any sport at any time. TBIs can significantly change a child's life. If you feel that your child may have sustained a TBI during play:

1. Seek medical attention right away.
2. Keep your child out of play.
3. Tell all of your child's coaches about any previous concussions, or more serious brain injuries.
4. Remind your child: It's better to miss one game than the whole season.