

A Message from BFS Editor Kim Goss, MS



BFS President John Rowbotham, shown here with his son Trace, loves the game of football.

Practice Makes Perfect

Through its publications, clinics, certifications, and special presentations, BFS is a leader in educating coaches, athletes, and parents about the dangers of concussion. One of the most exciting developments being researched today is the use of the OptoJump™ system to objectively and scientifically determine when an athlete who has suffered a concussion can safely return to play. Hoping to reduce the incidence of concussion in sport, the NCAA recently recommended a cap on the number of contact practices that can be performed by college football players during the preseason, in season, and during spring

ball. If approved, this recommendation is sure to work its way to the high school level, an action that is cause for concern.

Commenting on the NCAA's recommendation is Scott Anderson, president of the College Athletic Trainers' Society, in an AP story published on July 7, 2014: "We're acting on what we know. The more contact, and the more intense the contact, the more likely that a concussion is to occur." Point taken, but we still have to consider the lack of overwhelming scientific evidence that having fewer contact practices results in fewer concussions. Especially worrisome is the likelihood that by limiting the amount of time football players spend in full-contact practices in a controlled environment, the players will be less prepared to encounter the conditions that occur in the game.

In this regard, an analogy can be made between football and the evolution of the sport of mixed martial arts. In the early days of MMA, many serious injuries occurred because the competitors usually were specialists in only one discipline. So, a boxer might be pitted against an expert in karate. The problem with such match-ups is that the fighters often did not know how to defend themselves; for example, boxers are skilled at being able to take blows to the head, whereas karate practitioners seldom experience such training. As the sport developed, MMA fighters

practiced a variety of disciplines so they could take a punch, counter a single-leg wrestling takedown, block a judo throw, and know when it was time to tap out of an arm bar. The eventual result of such training was a significant reduction in the risk of serious injury during competition.

We applaud the NCAA for addressing the issue of concussion, and we support many of its attempts to deal with the problem, such as its suggestion that colleges hire independent doctors to evaluate athletes who have sustained this type of brain injury. However, we question the wisdom of limiting the number of practices that can be performed in a game-type environment if the outcome is that players wind up inadequately prepared for the rigors of competition. To borrow a popular slogan used in the military, "Train the way you are going to fight!"

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