

NFLAA Executive Director George Martin's Statement at the  
House Judiciary Committee Hearing on Football-Related Head Injuries  
October 28, 2009

Chairman Conyers, distinguished members of the of the Judiciary committee, my fellow colleagues Commissioner Roger Goodell and Executive Director DeMaurice Smith. I sincerely consider my presence here today to be both privilege and honor. A privilege in the fact that for the moment I have a respected platform of which to bring a rather alarming issue to light from an extremely unique perspective, and honored by the fact that I represent a constituency that will be observing the outcome of these hearings from more than a casual perspective. Therefore I applaud these proceeding as hopefully they will represent the impetus, and serve as the catalyst to effect greater and more meaningful response to an ever-growing medical phenomenon.

As Executive Director of the NFL Alumni Association, the recent medical finding surrounding head trauma in the NFL in general, and concussions more specifically, (though admittedly inconclusive), have sparked sharp debate and generated considerable interest within this industry; While we as concerned representatives of the Alumni Association find the initial medical results alarming to say the least. Unlike my other esteemed colleagues here today and with all due respect, I am the only one here that can give direct and actual firsthand accounts of the violence and oftentimes injurious aftermath of professional athletes, which in some cases leads to accelerated diminished physical and mental capacity, or fatal human collateral.

As a former defensive lineman in the National Football League for 14 seasons, I have had the unenviable experience of enduring life in the commonly referred to "NFL Trenches", and unfortunately during an era when violent tactical maneuvers such as head-slaps, forearm shivers, clothes-lines tackles and violent head butts were commonplace among all facets of NFL football; although most have since been eliminated. The resulting severity of these combative interactions were oftentimes trivialized and minimized by the powers to be, usually referring to such incidences as simply "getting your bell rung, getting your clocked cleaned, or having cobwebs in your bonnet".

You may ask the obvious question as to "WHY"? Why reference such antiquated and archaic behavior that has long since been banded from use in professional athletic. The answer is rather simple, though the practice of such brutality has long since vanished; the resulting delayed consequences remain present, and are feared to be more prevalent and widespread among our aging alumni population than any of us dared realized.

Today we acknowledge that such “Blunt Force Trauma” is inherently dangerous and according to several recent studies most notably *the Center for the Study of Traumatic Encephalopathy (CSTE), at the Boston University School of Medicine, is that such incidences can perhaps lead to premature death among athletes.*

The sum total of such medical afflictions such as Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE) cannot be accurately measured merely by commissioning a single study, as the all encompassing illness adversely affects each and every family member who happens to be associated with the victim or patient.

I will reluctantly highlight this point by betraying a confidence of a personal friend who has over the course of a professional life-time, has meant the world to me as mentor, teammate and business associate. After 10 NFL seasons as a star running back, this gentleman retired as seemly the picture of health. He diligently maintained a rigorous regiment of athletic activity, while playing competitive tennis three to four times a week. He also maintained a healthy diet, and never varied 5 lbs above or below his optimum weight. Additionally, he owns a string of fast food franchise consisting of more than 40 stores throughout the northeast region. Business travel both domestically and internationally was a necessary and frequent occurrence. To say that he maintained an active lifestyle would have been an understatement.

There were no overt signs of diminished capacity in his life style, except one fateful day after returning from a business trip he simply forgot where he parked his car. Upon sharing the story to us his friends, we all had an amusing laugh at his expense and naively chocked it up as simple happenstance. He himself would jokingly say on numerous occasions “George, I guess I got hit in the head a few too many time”. This incident happened only two short years ago. However, within the span of 24 months, this once vibrant, hyper active individual, has been reduced to a mere shell of his former self, who in now confined to self-imposed houses arrest, and with each passing day slips further and further away from the dynamic personality that we all once knew. The same, embarrassment and degradation are but the tip of the iceberg that he and his family are painfully enduring each and every passing day. This unfortunate scenario rings a far too familiar reframe among many NFL alumni.

If my presence here today, and my very public betrayal of this deeply confidential situation of a former NFL colleague results in illuminating this potentially catastrophic medical calamity, then I would conclude that neither have been in vain.

The general consensus among most NFL alumni centers around four primary concerns.

1. First and foremost “Prevention”. So that the perpetual cycle of reoccurrence of these situations in the sport itself is severely diminished or better yet, totally eliminated through innovative rule changes, and enhanced protective equipment

in the sport.

2. Secondly, proper diagnosis and effective medical treatment without laborious and agonizing red-tape, that often times becomes a painful prelude that's discouraging and a completely exacerbates an already dire situation.
3. Thirdly, that such medical treatment not result in a financially catastrophic tsunami, which predominantly wreaks financial havoc on the surviving family members.
4. Finally, a more comprehensive study which should includes a veritable cross section of alumni, in order to accurately determine the full extent of the problem among retirees who may be predisposed to this insidious debilitating medical condition.

On behalf of all NFL Alumni, we greatly appreciate this forum in which to state our position on these vital matters