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Why I'm Not Buying Football Season Tickets



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By [Noah Kulwin](#) | Staff

After a lot of thought, I've decided to not buy football season tickets for this coming fall. I have had them the past two seasons, and the medical evidence surrounding the sport's destructive nature convinced me to pocket my \$100 instead.

Last May, a group called Intelligence Squared sponsored a debate on whether to ban college football. A portion of the discussion concerned the nature of our "social contract" with higher education, and by extension college sports. New Yorker writer Malcolm Gladwell's comment explained the logic to ban college football best: "Nowhere in that social contract does it say that

it's okay to promote and encourage young men to hit themselves over and over again in the head in the name of entertainment.”

In addition to discussions about NCAA scholarships and paying student-athletes, there needs to be room for conversation about what we are doing to the bodies of those who play the sport. And if you've paid attention at all in the last few years, you know that football is not “just a game” or any other form of entertainment. It is a lifelong war of attrition on the bodies of otherwise healthy young men.

Many football players suffer concussions throughout their high school, college or professional careers and develop chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) – the degenerative neurological disease found in the brains of many former football players, including ex-NFL star Junior Seau. Seau committed suicide last spring after repeated bouts of depression. But a former player need not be immediately symptomatic or even have been concussed in order to be affected by years of football.

According to a recent study, it doesn't even take a concussion to rattle the brain with long-term effects. The study, conducted by medical researchers at the Cleveland Clinic, found that “even in the absence of concussion, football players may experience repeated [blood-brain barrier disruption]” – a mixing of brain fluid and blood that has been shown to lead to neurological diseases like Alzheimer's. There is no “safe way” to play or recover from football. As Bloomberg sports columnist Jonathan Mahler writes, “by framing football's head-injury crisis as a concussion crisis, we have understated its severity.”

The Berkeley community would do well to keep tabs on former Cal tailback Jahvid Best, our Heisman candidate who went in the first round of the 2010 NFL Draft to the Detroit Lions. Best, after multiple concussions in his short-lived NFL career, will probably not be allowed to play football again with his medical history. Of the dozens of Cal football alumni who are playing in the NFL (or have finished their time in the league), simple probability suggests that many of them will also suffer permanent cognitive damage as a result of the sport.

Nevertheless, Cal football will take the field this year with our new “Bear Raid” offense and \$10 million coach Sonny Dykes. But I do not have to look further than home to recognize why staying away from football games is the right choice.

My older brother last played football about fifteen years ago, in high school and as a walk-on at the University of Southern Mississippi – the alma mater of NFL players like Adalius Thomas and Brett Favre. I've heard stories of broken noses and hard hits since I was in elementary school. I grew up worshipping the Manning family, Phil Simms and other titans of the sport. But now it's different.

I'm happy my brother quit football. It means maybe he'll remember my name as long as I remember his. And until we stop playing around with ideas like “improving the safety of the sport,” and instead recognize that we need to stop playing it altogether, I can only hope for the same for the families of other football players.

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Contact Noah Kulwin at nkulwin@dailycal.org or follow him on Twitter: [@noahkulwin](#).