

RISK vs. REWARD

ATHLETES MUST BALANCE FUN, POTENTIAL EARNINGS AGAINST LONG-TERM HEALTH ISSUES

LANE FORTENBERRY
UP CONTRIBUTOR

From the first time they strap on the pads in Pee Wee football, kids dream of the bright lights of the NFL and multi-million dollar contracts. For a lucky few, that dream may become a reality, but for most, it will never be more than playing for the love of the game.

However, football is a hard-fought contest, and that love that comes with a risk.

Recently, San Francisco 49er linebacker Chris Borland retired after just one season due to fear of concussion injuries and their risks. Lamar University head coach Ray Woodard says if a player came to him with the same decision, he would not attempt to sway him.

"I think that each individual has the right to decide what they feel is best for them — I respect the decision he made," Woodard says. "Fear of injury is a part of our game. I would address that. If the player had multiple concussions or was suffering from concussion-related symptoms, then I would not attempt to make them continue to play. I do not feel that is my place."

The health effects of football have been in the forefront of the news lately. Retired players sued the NFL, accusing the league of not warning them about concussions and their symptoms. They are trying to force the league to offer baseline medical exams for retired players, monetary awards for diagnoses of ALS, Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, dementia and chronic traumatic encephalopathy or CTE, a neuropathological finding diagnosed after death, and education programs and initiatives related to football safety.

NCAA concussion protocols have been enhanced and enforced in recent years due to the number of players experiencing symptoms. The NCAA will give \$70 million for testing and diagnosis of former and current student athletes as a part of a lawsuit against that organization.

A study by Harvard and Boston University shows that 26 of 27 potential concussions go unreported.

"We have a consistent policy in place dealing with football concussions and its symptoms," Lamar head football coach Raymond Woodard says. "Once a player shows any symptoms whatsoever, our athletic trainer takes over and it is completely out of the coach's hands. We do not attempt to practice or play a player until he is cleared by our trainer and medical team."

Woodard said he would not let a player return to the game if he shows concussion symptoms. It's up to the athletic trainer and medical team, not the player.

Lamar offensive lineman Bret Treadway says he has suffered many injuries in his 10 year football career.

"I've had two torn labrums in both hips and a torn labrum in my right shoulder," he says. "I may have had two small concussions throughout my career, but neither were diagnosed and symptoms usually left the morning after football games. Although, once a concussion occurs, even the small hits damage the brain more."

"I played through every injury I have had during a game. I usually kept it to myself. There's really nothing you can do for labrum tears except surgery, and that injury, although painful, can be played on. However, your brain isn't meant to take the constant pounding of 220-plus-pound grown men hitting you head on. As a player you are encouraged to come off of the field by the trainers if you have any concussion symptoms, but some coaches, on the other hand, sometimes push for the player to keep playing."

Treadway, however, doesn't believe the protocol is the problem — he believes it's the players not wanting to sit out of the game.

"Players know their coaches want them to continue to play," he says. "College coaches today played in a different era of football when they were in college. In that era, players were encouraged to play with stingers, dizziness, etc. because there was no scientific evidence behind concussions. Most of those players that are now coaches feel they are perfectly fine, even though they played through the concussions, so that encouragement of playing through concussions is still pushed in today's era."

Suffering multiple concussions over a long period of time can lead to serious injury, Dr. James Holmes says.

"It is sort of like a bruise to another part of the body," he says. "Blunt force causes tissue damage which has to heal and over time can lead to scar tissue and nerve damage."

"Providing more information about concussions to players would be very beneficial — making it known that concealing a head injury is not toughing it out, it's putting yourself as a player in more danger. It will take time and more understanding for players and coaches to realize what the long term effects of suffering concussions can and will do."

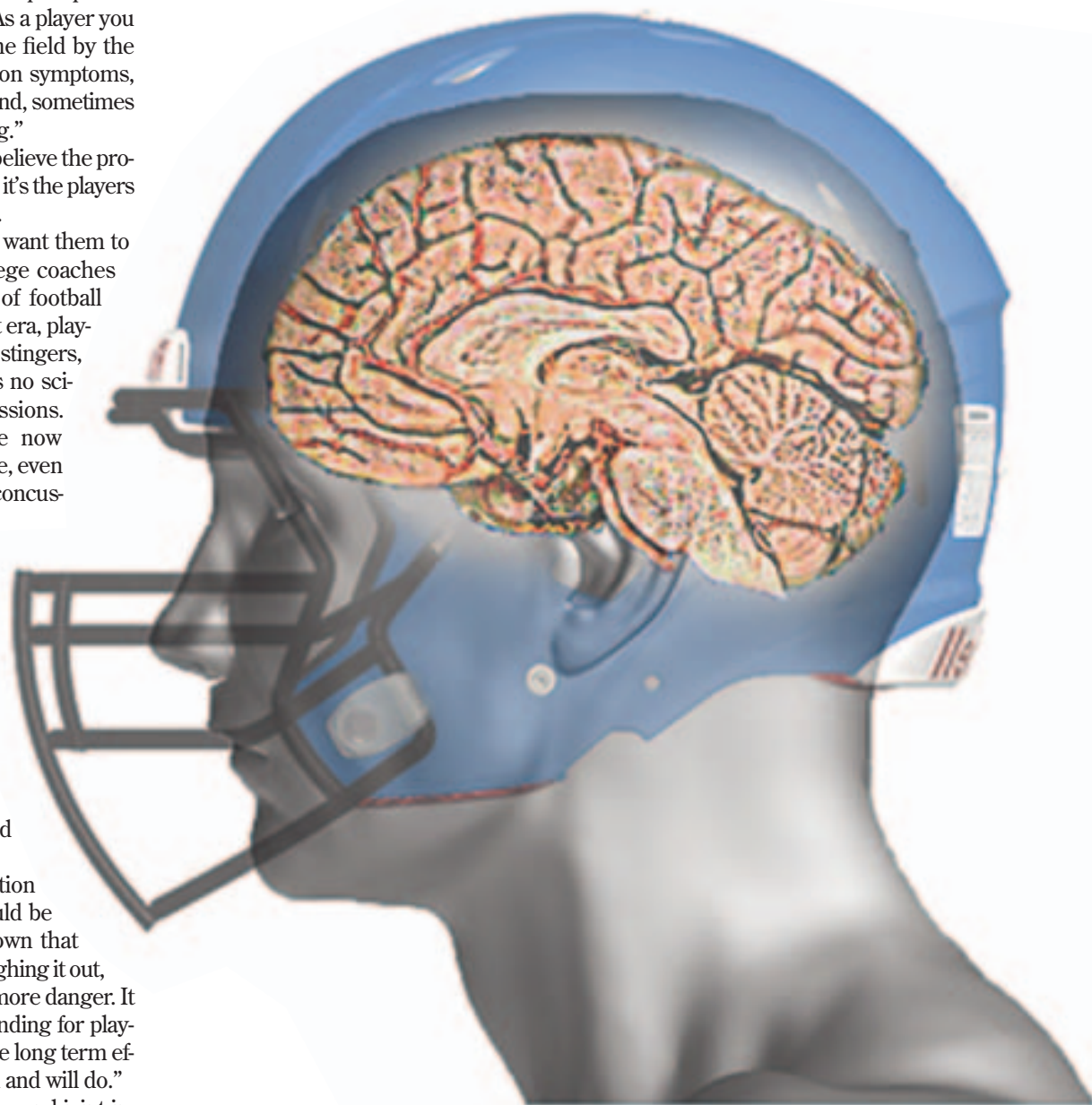
Dr. Holmes says muscle, bone and joint injuries can lead to pain at older ages.

"Traumatic injury to muscles and joints will ultimately lead to a degenerative process and will start to break down the joint and ligaments surrounding that joint, which will lead to wear and tear, and eventually lead to severe arthritis and sclerosis of the body," he says. "Also, depending on the extent of the hamstring injury, our body is really good about compensating and getting used to using what is available. Playing too much with hamstring injuries can, over time, cause scarring of the muscle tissue affecting its performance, and also lead to nerve pain as the sciatic nerve runs through the belly of the hamstring muscle."

The ultimate question players have to face is, "Is the risk of injury to your body and complications down the road worth the experience and salary of playing football at the NCAA and NFL level?"

"I wrestle more with this the older I get," Woodard, who played in the NFL for five years, says. "I loved playing football, and have so many

26 of 27
concussions go unreported



Conditions linked to concussion include:

ALS, Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, dementia and chronic traumatic encephalopathy or CTE

UP Desmond Pickens

fond memories and great experiences related to the game. I owe the game a lot. It molded me into the man I am today.

"On the other hand, at 53, I feel the toll the game has taken on my body every day. I too had many variations of concussions and related symptoms. I feel that it will impair the quality of my life as I grow older. That is a grave concern of mine. I know I certainly would have answered this question differently 30 years ago. I now realize that as great as I feel the game of football is and all that it has done for me, it has been a trade-off. I think the individual has to decide if it is worth it to them."

As a college player now, Treadway says it really depends on the injuries the player suffers while playing.

"Brain injuries, as well as back and neck injuries, are not worth the salary or the joy of football," he says. "I feel that other injuries are worth the salary and joy of football, as long as it will not prevent me from doing regular activities later in life."

"I have thought about hanging the cleats up, but as of now, the joy of the game is worth the pain. I'm sure it will get to a point when the pain is not worth the joy and when that time comes, I surely will hang my cleats up with no regrets."

Men's tennis heads into SLC ranked 2nd



UP Grant Crawford

Senior Mikko Rajamaki practices at the Beaumont Municipal Tennis Courts, Tuesday.

GRANT CRAWFORD
UP SPORTS EDITOR
@GRANTLAMARUP

After defeating the University of New Orleans six to one at the Thompson Family Tennis Center, Sunday, Lamar's men's tennis team heads into the Southland Conference tournament, Saturday through Sunday, with the second seed for the first time since 1982.

"We feel very great about it," Lamar head coach Scott Shankles said. "We're excited that we were able to finish as high as we did. We've worked very, very hard all season."

Lamar (13-10, 4-1 SLC) will have to face UNO again this weekend for a chance to move on to the championship match.

"My expectations are very high," Shankles said. "One of our goals was to win the regular-season title. We came up short. We made it to the conference finals last year — we came up short, as well. So, we feel like we can win it this year. It's going to take a lot, since we're playing a single elimination. We have New Orleans first, and I know they are going to be gunning for us harder than they did last week, so that will be a very tough first round."

After a tough road trip to South Carolina over the spring break, the team made a big turnaround, Shankles said.

Lamar won five of seven matches following spring break to finish out the regular season.

"We knew we were finishing up non-conference, and we felt like there were more matches we could have won," Shankles said. "We all just had a meeting and decided that we needed to practice better, and that would give us a better chance to have a high conference finish."

One player not to be overlooked is Lamar's Nikita Lis, who was awarded the SLC player of the week for the second time this season.

The sophomore helped lead the Cardinals to their victory, Sunday, first, defeating Timo Kranz in straight sets 6-1, 7-5. He then joined forces with Jeandre Hoogenboezem to claim an 8-4 victory over Kranz and Roman Lefevre.

"Our No. 1 player (Lis) has done a great job at line one, but people need to take note of his doubles, and his record," Shankles said. "His spring record alone is 17-0. He has not lost a single match at all in the spring. So, he's been huge for us."

The Southland Conference tournament will be hosted by Lamar, and played at the Beaumont Municipal Tennis Center, Saturday and Sunday.

"It's always fun to play at home, in front of your fans," Shankles said. "You get to sleep in your own bed — eat at whatever restaurant you want to. There's just something special about playing at home, and we're really looking forward to playing in Beaumont."

The match against New Orleans will start at 2 p.m., Saturday.

UP SPORTS BRIEFS

Women's Golf

The Lamar Lady Cardinals golf team fired a three-round 307-296-289-892, Wednesday, to win the 2015 Southland Conference title. The victory earns them the league's automatic bid to the NCAA Regional Championships.

Lamar defeated Central Arkansas by nine strokes. The victory was also a piece of Southland Conference history for the Lamar women, becoming the first program in conference history to win the title three years in a row.

Senior Nghi Ngo became the only player in Southland Conference history to win three championship rings, and just like in previous years, she played a vital role, Wednesday. Ngo tied for eighth with an 80-74-73-227.

The Lady Cardinals return to action May 7, when they open play in the NCAA Regional Championships. The site was still to be determined at press time.

Baseball

Lamar tried to strike a ninth inning rally, but eight runs conceded in the middle three innings were too much for the Cardinals to overcome in their 8-6 loss to Baylor in Waco, Tuesday. LU will play Incarnate Word at 6 p.m., Friday, at Vincent- Beck Stadium.