



HEADSTRONG

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CASS' CORNER

"A Teen and Life" (not Skid Row . . .)

We are living in different times now, than we were, thirty-five years ago. Things, in general, have changed significantly in our lives, since, say, 1980, more than three and a half decades back, now.



Though, the seeming 'hell' I remember, on the practice field, every day after school. "Run a mile before we break into our drills" and "eat one another's lunch!" My head and brain were so pounded, academically and in the abstract, before I lined up across from the row of "meat-eaters" facing me, on the other side of the line.

Every day, Monday through Friday, we would change into our football gear after school and head out, "literally," as kids would say, these days, to do the junior high and high school equivalent of pounding our classmates' brains out.

I am not saying this was done by choice. See, my dad was a high school football star, and the glory he enjoyed was something he wanted to see continued in his perhaps more cerebral-oriented son, beginning in seventh grade. Yes, beginning at age 11 and 12, that's right. the earlier you start, the more developed a monster you will become, out on the gridiron (this statement is especially true in my case, given that I was playing as an offensive lineman; according to the Scientific American piece I was referencing while writing this, I read that linemen were "estimated to sustain more than twice as many impacts per season as receivers (Broglia et al., 2011)).

Before continuing, I hasten to state that football, without question, though undoubtedly a risky sport, physically, does promote fitness, teamwork and leadership. The study cited found, for instance, that football players were more active at age 35 than non-football players (though, I cannot help but wonder about the likely more physically and mentally beneficial fitness enjoyed by competitive or even mere regular swimmers. . .).

Prior to my delving into the piece from Scientific American magazine that I gathered my information from, I remembered my youth. The years I spent in Wisconsin where, incidentally, my paternal figure was a standout football player.

I read that American football is the largest participation sport in American high schools. I was reminded of many having expressed concern about the physical safety of football, with some even calling for an outright ban on youth and high school tackle football. There was a study published in *JAMA* (Journal of American Medical Association) Neurology that suggested, in general, men who played high school football in Wisconsin in the 1950s did not have a higher risk of poor emotional or cognitive health in their later life than those who did not play . . . Hmm . . .

More recent concerns have arisen, however, largely driven by reports of chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), among retired professional players. CTE is a neurodegenerative disease that we have learned results from repeated head trauma. Symptoms may include memory loss, confusion, aggression and depression, oftentimes leading to suicidal tendencies in those who suffer the infirmity.

"This is all well and good," you may well be thinking, "but, Cass, you are talking about football history in Wisconsin, in Colorado, in the United States. Surely we have better sense than that in our beloved Great White North . . ."

Fair enough. Bearing that in mind, I began a search into more timely and/or recent football injuries in Canadian high schools:

Wow, it did not take long to spot this one!

"High school football game ends after 9 players suffer head injuries"

"Coach of Ecole L'Odysee's Olympiens says team was forced to forfeit due to safety concerns (Sarah Petz, CBC News, Oct. 15, 2017 12:52 PM AT).

My goodness; the coach of a Moncton high school football team said his team was forced to forfeit a game Friday after several of his players suffered head injuries. At least four of those players showed signs of concussion.

Perhaps these players ought to be prompted to, instead, invest time in their school's respective aquatics program.

I hear there's much less chance of concussion and head injury, when swimming . . .
