



THE GOLDHABER WARNINGS REPORT



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DO WE NEED TO WARN PARENTS ABOUT THE DANGERS OF PLAYING FOOTBALL?

As I write this issue of the Goldhaber Warnings Report, the City of New Orleans is celebrating its NFL Football team's unexpected win in this year's Super Bowl. On the day after the New Orleans victory, the House Judiciary Committee convened its third hearing, in Houston, Texas, on football injuries. Unlike its previous hearings which addressed the NFL's lack of adequate protection against brain injuries, the Houston hearing focused on risks faced by younger football players. Several million high school and college students play football, and researchers now estimate that, according to an editorial in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (Feb.7, 2010), young players suffer 140,000 concussions each year...with almost ½ of those injured returning to play so soon that they are at risk for even more serious brain injury. Given that so many of our youth are at risk for serious brain injury, the question must be asked if their parents are aware of such a risk.

Although it is somewhat dated, I conducted a national survey of 1007 parents of high school football players in 1993 to determine their awareness of the potential of severe brain injury from playing football. Overall, parents were uninformed about both the risk of severe brain injury and the football helmet warnings about that risk. Specifically, unprompted, most parents mentioned broken bones, knee injuries, sprains, or shoulder injuries as hazards associated with playing football. Few parents (only 6 out of 1007) mentioned severe brain damage. Even when prompted, only 25% mentioned the risk of brain injury. Further, the overwhelming majority of parents (78%) incorrectly believed that wearing a helmet generally eliminated the risk of severe brain injury. Very few parents (11%) had either received information about this risk (from any source) or were aware of the warning label on the helmet (37%). In short, parents, who in most states must approve their child's playing on the football team, were unaware of the severe risk of brain injury from playing football. We plan to repeat this survey this year, but I doubt the results will differ significantly. If you would like to read the complete results of my original survey, please consult the *Journal of Athletic Training* (Volume 28, Number 4, 1993, pp.306-311).

Please feel free to pass this newsletter on to any interested friends or colleagues.