**Name:**

**ARTICLE OF THE WEEK\***

|  |
| --- |
| 1. **Read the following articles. Mark your confusion about words or topics. Show your thinking using thorough Harvard reading strategy annotations.** 2. **Answer the EOC questions and put the question’s number next to where you found your answer in the text.** 3. **Write a reflection showing your thinking on the topic.** |

**Annotations**

**87 of 91 Tested ex-NFL Players had Brain Disease Linked to Head Trauma**

Source: Jason Hannah, Debra Goldschmidt, and Kevin Flower, CNN.com

Eighty-seven of 91 former NFL players who donated their brains to science after death tested positive for a brain disease that is believed to be linked with repeated head trauma and concussions, researchers said. The former players were found to have had chronic traumatic encephalopathy, known as CTE, according to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and Boston University. It's not clear why some players develop the disease and others don't. The study results don't necessarily mean that 96% of all NFL players are at risk for CTE, said Dr. Robert Cantu. The brains came from players who, while they were alive, had concerns about CTE. His group began its work in 2008.The data was published on the website for the Concussion Legacy Foundation, which Cantu co-founded, and first reported Friday by the documentary TV program "Frontline."

**Postmortem diagnosis**

CTE is a progressive degenerative brain disease found in some athletes and others with a history of repetitive brain trauma. The brain tissue of people found to have CTE displays an abnormal build-up of tau -- a protein that, when it spills out of cells, can choke off, or disable, neural pathways controlling things like memory, judgment and fear. Cantu is unequivocally clear that CTE is not unique to athletes. "There are a number of cases in people who never saw an athletic field," he said. Cantu gave the examples of former military members, people who have suffered from gram mal seizures, autistic children who rocked and banged their heads, abuse victims, and even people who were shot out of a cannon as part of a circus act.

**CTE can be diagnosed only after death.**

Earlier this year, the NFL and thousands of former players settled a lawsuit that provides up to $5 million per retired player for serious medical conditions associated with repeated head trauma. While the lawsuit was a combination of hundreds of actions brought by more than 5,000 former players, it may apply to as many as 20,000 former ex-NFLers. The overall rate of incidence of CTE among NFL players can only be determined after a number of brains from players who did not exhibit or experience any symptoms of CTE, are studied, Cantu said.

**Should You Let Your Kids Play Football?**

Source: Roxanne Jones, CNN.com

When Oakland Raiders NFL running back Maurice Jones-Drew retired recently at just 29 years old, he said his life had been focused on football for 24 years and he needed a change. It's no wonder he wanted out. He has been playing football since he was 5 years old. Sound too young to strap on a helmet? Not really. Jones-Drew is no different from thousands of other boys whose parents introduce them to the gridiron just a few years out of diapers. Football is America's favorite sport. We pride ourselves on our toughness, on our ability to get back up when we're knocked down. What better sport is there to teach those lessons? But today, youth football is not looking like the best option.

In 2012, an estimated 225,287 children -- down 9.5% since 2010 -- between the ages of 5 and 14 played Pop Warner football, in which the weight class for the 5-year-olds ranges from 35 to 79 pounds. With such lightweight boys competing with children more than twice their size, it's no wonder parents feel less inclined to put their kids in this sport. But not too long ago, parents thought nothing of sending their children out on the football field to run around and burn up a little energy. Many parents still insist youth football is safe. What could be healthier for a boy? Certainly, it beats sitting in front of a computer all day.

**Annotations**

That's exactly what Debra Pyka thought when she signed up her son, Joseph Chernach, for Pop Warner football in Wisconsin, then later in Michigan, when he was 11 years old, in 1997. If only she knew then that her son would be dead at 25. Joseph hung himself in his mother's shed on June 7, 2012. His brain was later found to have severe CTE, a degenerative brain disease that has been linked to concussions in football. Joseph Chernach had played sports, including wrestling, pole vaulting and football most of his young life. But he spent almost four years playing Pop Warner football from ages 11 to 14. "My son was the class comedian, loved school, always fun to be around," Pyka told me. "But we noticed after high school Joseph changed. He got depressed, angry, paranoid and withdrew from sports and his friends. We just didn't know why. After learning about CTE, I knew he had it even before we got the results. The symptoms were all there." Pyka is convinced those early days playing Pop Warner football triggered her son's CTE. Last month, Pyka and her son's estate filed a lawsuit against Pop Warner football for $5 million, claiming the nonprofit failed to protect its youngest players and warn them and their parents about the permanent dangers of head trauma.

Since filing her suit, Pyka, a registered nurse, said she's found some solace by connecting with other parents who want to make football safer for children, but she also has received plenty of hateful emails criticizing her for allowing her son to play in the first place. Critics say that she knew what she was doing when she signed her son up to play football and some even suggest that Pyka should be charged with murder for allowing Joseph to sign up for football, Pyka told me, clearly upset.

"I didn't sign my son up to get a brain disease," she said. "We wanted him to play sports, to be active. We knew nothing about concussions then. It wasn't discussed much. It's still not talked about enough today. Should we all be arrested for letting our kids play football?"

Clearly, the lawsuit faces obstacles, especially since Chernach did play other sports and it may be hard to prove the CTE was triggered by injuries suffered while playing for Pop Warner. But Pyka and her attorney, Gordon Johnson, at the Brain Injury Law Group, which is representing Chernach's estate, insist this case is not just about winning. They are going after the economics of youth football leagues. And if they win the lawsuit it may be less possible for those leagues to buy the insurance policies that allow very young children to play tackle football.

"We have to prove that Pop Warner was a substantial factor in him getting it [CTE], and we knew from research that playing under 12 is when you're most vulnerable," Johnson told media when he filed the suit. "The airing of these issues will benefit everybody," he added.

Some good has come out of all this, said Pkya. More people are talking about CTE. She said it's important that parents listen closely to NFLers like 24-year-old Chris Borland, the San Francisco 49ers linebacker who retired this week after just one season. Borland said he quit because he was afraid of brain injuries. He understands how his decision may affect parents and he has a message:

" Parents ... if you weigh the risk and decide this is something you want to partake in. ... It's a free country. ... But If I could relay a message to kids and their parents it would be twofold: Number one: make an informed decision. And number two: Don't play through concussions. Who knows how many hits is too many?"

Considering the consequences, it just may be one of the toughest decisions a parent has to make.

\*This is an adaption of Kelly Gallagher's Article of the Week (www.kellygallagher.org/article-of-the-week). Questions have been added to help SC students prepare for the SCCCRS End of Course Exam.

**Name:**

Two Articles about the Connection between Football and CTE

Circle the *best* answer for each of the following questions based on your reading of the article. Remember that your response should be based on a reading of *this* article. Be sure to mark where you got your answers by writing the question’s number next to the answer in the text.

1. What does CTE stand for in the context of this article?
   1. Causes for Traumatic Effects
   2. Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy
   3. Chronic Trauma Entropy
   4. Contact Trauma Encephalopathy
2. Which statement most accurately reflects the relevance of the findings that 87 or 91 Ex-NFL tested have CTE?
   1. 96% of all football players have CTE.
   2. This high number may reflect a higher number of incidence than in the past.
   3. The high percentage of tested football players may indicate that there is likely a high number of untested football players.
   4. There are many children who likely have CTE.
3. Which of the following best defines the word “unequivocally” as it is used in paragraph two?
   1. Having little impact
   2. Not completely
   3. Leaving no doubt
   4. Unclear
4. What is the overall *tone* of the first article?
   1. Unhappy
   2. Aggravated
   3. Informative
   4. Compassionate
5. Why might the author of the second article have included the story about Maurice Jones-Drew?
   1. To show that some players are quitting because they are afraid of brain damage
   2. To illustrate that the life of an NFL player is shortened by brain damage.
   3. To introduce the trend in American culture to start play football at a young age.
   4. To help the audience relate to the topic by using a prominent football player.
6. Which of the following quotes from the first paragraph of the second article most reflects the author’s *bias*?
   1. “. . . he said his life had been focused on football for over 24 years and he needed a change.”
   2. “He has been playing football since he was 5 years old.
   3. “Football is America’s favorite sport.”
   4. “But today, youth football is not looking like the best option.”
7. What is the reason Debra Pyke is suing Pop Warner?
   1. For reimbursement for her son’s life.
   2. To divert attention away from herself and accusations that she murdered her son.
   3. That Pop Warner did not do enough to protect and warn its youngest players.
   4. To support research for research that will save the lives of people with CTE.
8. Which of the following best paraphrases Chris Borland’s argument at the end of the second article?
   1. That football players should stop playing football immediately to avoid brain injury.
   2. That parents should be well informed about the risks of head injury before allowing their children to play football.
   3. That parents should not force children to play football.
   4. That parents who made their children play when they were young are to blame for deaths associated with football injuries.
9. Write a reflection on this article using the full space below. Cite specific evidence from the article that connects your thinking to this reading. You may use the questions at the end of the article for guidance in writing your reflection.

Possible Response Questions:

* Will you let your child play football when you are a parent? Explain.
* How do these articles affect your thinking about playing football? Explain
* Select any passage and respond to it.