

Testimony of Steven Threet

Before the United States Senate Committee on Science, Commerce, and Transportation

“Concussions and the Marketing of Sports Equipment”

October 19, 2011

First I would like to thank Chairman Rockefeller and the other committee members for inviting me. It is a great honor to be here speaking on a topic that has changed my life and I am happy to help raise awareness about such a critical issue in both male and female sports. Dealing with concussions can be a very difficult process for the injured person and their family; so it is exciting for me to see such a prestigious and capable group of individuals who are willing to learn more in an effort to better educate and protect all athletes.

Throughout my playing career I faced a multitude of injuries. However, none caused more confusion both literally and figuratively at the time that they occurred than concussions. Each of the four documented concussions that I experienced were unique in the way in which they occurred. I have sustained concussions from hits directly to my head by another player, from my head hitting the ground, and also as a result of consecutive impacts on separate plays. While my symptoms were often similar, they ranged from slight dizziness and blurred vision to extreme light sensitivity and a constant headache. The severity of my symptoms had no recognizable pattern. In two of the cases I was cleared and played without problem one week after I sustained a concussion. In one instance I returned to play two weeks after the injury. However the most severe symptoms were a result from my last concussion, which I suffered on November 26, 2010. Those symptoms ultimately led to my decision to end my football playing career.

During my playing days, brain injury was never a major concern to me. After my first concussion, which happened on the last play of a high school game my senior year, I was able to start the next game. It was not until my symptoms became serious that my attitude about the injury changed. At the time when I decided to retire, I saw my decision simply as the right one to make. However, in the aftermath it has become apparent to me that my decision can also be seen as an example of how dangerous brain injuries can be. I want to make it clear that my goal in speaking is not to deter athletes from competing. I only wish that they acknowledge the seriousness of a brain injury and respect the process that comes with recovery.

In all sports a certain aggressive mentality is required to be successful. The passion and intensity football players rely on is an example of this; and what makes the game beautiful. As a former quarterback at premier college football programs I know the importance of and took pride in being physically and mentally tough, out working my opponent, leaving it all on the field, and playing through injury. However, athletes must understand that a mild brain injury is not a shoulder separation. It is not an injury to be played through. They must understand that playing through a brain injury is NOT a sign of toughness, but it is a sign that says athletes are still uninformed.

Statistics recently revealed that about 40% of athletes who have sustained a concussion return to play too early and that 50% of concussions go unnoticed. This makes me believe that the only focus should be to create an open dialogue between athletes, coaches, doctors, and families that addresses the seriousness of brain injuries in athletics and the need for a full recovery before returning to play. I know it is possible to decrease those statistics. I also know progress on this issue is already being made and many states have already passed legislation dealing with concussion protocols.

Unfortunately, there is no brain brace, concussion proof helmet, or magic pill for immediate recovery. However I believe **THERE IS** a misunderstanding about concussion prevention and treatment within the athlete cohort as well as the general public. For example, a football helmet is often thought of as a brain protector. However, it is designed to protect the bone structure of the head, not the brain itself. If a helmet could guarantee protection from concussions, I would still be playing football.

Once again thank you for this opportunity but more importantly thank you for taking the time to learn and show your support for this issue here today. I look forward to the future progress that I know can and will be made.