

The Post-Journal

www.post-journal.com

JAMESTOWN, N.Y.

FRIDAY

MAY 2, 2014

VOL 187 NO. 348

B

SPORTS

Inside

Scoreboard, B4

The Post-Journal

FRIDAY, MAY 2, 2014

THE BATTLE WITHIN

'I Threw A Boxing Career Away'

Ciancaglini Tells JCC Audience The Dangers of Concussive Hits To The Brain

BY JAY YOUNG
jyoung@post-journal.com

In his crusade to educate the public about the dangers of head trauma in athletics, retired boxer Ray Ciancaglini returned to Jamestown Community College for the third time on Thursday evening to present students and athletes with his lecture entitled, "The Battle Within."

"The game that you sit out today, could be the career that you save tomorrow," is the motto that Ciancaglini tries to impress upon young athletes.

Since being forced to leave the world of competitive boxing at the age of 20 due to neurological damage sustained in the ring

"My life now consists of not what I want to do, but what I am capable of doing. I've had a headache every day since the age of 16, and I'm now 63."

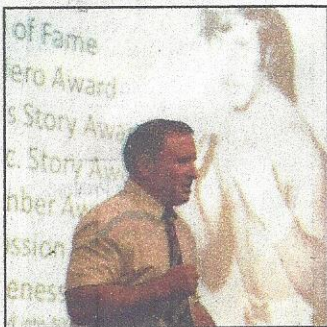
• **Ray Ciancaglini**
Retired boxer

during a bout in Buffalo, Ciancaglini has spent his life visiting communities around New York State, free of charge, to tell his personal story of just how dangerous concussive hits to the brain can be.

While the former Golden Glove Heart

Award winner and Rochester Boxing Hall of Fame member has visited the campus at JCC before, last night's speaking event included a screening of the acclaimed Steve James documentary "Head Games."

See CIANCAGLINI, Page B2



Ray Ciancaglini addresses the audience at Jamestown Community College on Thursday.

P-J photo by Jay Young

FRIDAY, MAY 2, 2014

Ciancaglini

From Page B1

The film takes an in-depth look at the traumatic head injuries sustained by athletes across many different sports, and the research that is currently underway to better understand the effects and treatment of concussions.

"I threw an entire boxing career away for one fight," he told the crowd gathered at the Lenna Teleconference Theatre in Hultquist Library. "My life now consists of not what I want to do, but what I am capable of doing. I've had a headache every day since the age of 16, and I'm now 63."

A perpetually hard-nosed fighter, Ciancaglini was a victim of his own perseverance in the ring as he continued to battle opponents despite suffering from second impact syndrome — a disease caused by competing through multiple concussions.

"The belief back then was that you had to be knocked unconscious to

have a brain injury," he said of his time in the boxing world.

While that belief may sound archaic and outdated considering what we know today about head trauma, the sad truth is that Ciancaglini continues to tour the state and speak to people because concussions are still underplayed.

"Never underestimate the powerful influence of peer pressure," he warns.

A main problem that Ciancaglini sees across all modern sports, professional and amateur, is the culture that has developed around "toughing it out."

Just as in the old days, athletes today are hesitant to admit that they are experiencing the symptoms of a concussion, and often hide their pain from coaches and teammates.

Worse yet, there are still plenty of athletes who wear their injuries, including concussions, as a badge of pride — what Ciancaglini calls "trash talk."

In his experience, there is nothing courageous about fighting your way through a concussion, especially considering everything we now know about the long-lasting effects of head trauma.

Repeated concussive hits to the brain have a huge list of terrible side effects, including dementia, chronic headaches, depression, anxiety, memory impairment and cognitive degeneration.

The only reasonable course of action to take when an athlete has even a slight possibility of a concussion, is to remove him or her from a game to seek medical attention. If head trauma has occurred, the only treatment for a brain

injury is extensive physical and mental rest.

"My problems could have been avoided if I had known the consequences of a concussion," Ciancaglini reminded the audience.

Unfortunately, sports culture and industry have been slow to accept the dire consequences of chronic traumatic encephalopathy, which has become the most common medical term for injury from concussions.

That change is the focus of "Head Games," which chronicles former Harvard football player Christopher Nowinski's efforts to shed light on head trauma in athletics.

After leaving college, Nowinski suffered a severe concussion during a stint as a professional wrestler, and has since made it his goal in life to address the same issues that Ciancaglini speaks on.

Helping Ciancaglini and Nowinski to educate the public is acclaimed neurosurgeon, Dr. Robert Cantu, who is the clinical professor of neurosurgery at Boston University School of Medicine and a concussion expert.

Dr. Cantu is a leading researcher in the field of traumatic brain injury and heads the National Center for Catastrophic Sports Injury Research in Chapel Hill, N.C.

Ciancaglini has been participating in Dr. Cantu's research in Boston over the past several years, and will be donating his brain for study following his death.

Anyone who is interested in finding out more about resolving traumatic brain injury in sports may go to www.thesecondimpact.com.