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## **Part 2 of Our Interview with Ray Ciancaglini: Apple Pie or Violence: Which is the American Tradition?**

In Part Two of our conversation with Ray Ciancaglini, we explore the connection between violence and brain injury in sports. Sports related concussion is an ongoing theme here on NeuroNotes. We want to capture different views of concussion. The following interview shares perspective on sports as a cause of brain injury. Are we hooked on violence? Should contact sports be banned?

Dr. Rolf B. Gainer (RBG): So let's segue over to football, because that's such a hot issue these days. And maybe we'll come back to boxing. I always like to talk boxing with you. So, is football more dangerous than boxing?

Ray Ciancaglini (RC): Absolutely not. But I'll give you the reason.

RBG: Okay.

RC: They are a part time sport. Boxing is a year round sport. Every day we take a hit to the head going in the gym sparring. They are limited to one day a week of contact in practice. Now, here's the key to the whole thing. When the play is on, a player gets his bell rung, that play is dead now. The play is over, and they have the option to get help. In boxing, we take a hit to the head and get a concussion, and within seconds there's two, three, four more hits coming. So the dangerous part of it, boxing is a lot more dangerous, but, gosh, I think we're adapted to it. In a sense, I think our training is more geared toward the durability part of that. I don't know if I'm making sense with that.

RBG: People are matched by weight class.

RC: There you go.

RBG: Not only the training, but it's the whole classification of the sport. Whereas, you get a quarterback who's going to be a relative lightweight getting ass over tea kettle by a linebacker who weighs 300 pounds and runs at thirty miles per hour.

RC: Oh yeah, punch for punch, they're on an even keel. And when you put it the way you just put it, it leans more toward boxing (being the less dangerous sport of the two), but on the other hand you can imagine the leverage from a Mike Tyson punch.

RBG: I just read somewhere that heavyweight is punched at 30 miles per hour, and it's the equivalent of being hit by a 30 pound bowling ball.

RC: Yes, and there are some middleweights, like David and Goliath, that speed means a lot. That's where everyone was surprised by Ray Leonard. He wasn't a big guy, but he'd knock you out because of that incredible speed and leverage that he had.

RBG: And who was that boxer out of Brockton, Massachusetts who had a quick pair of hands on him, too?

RC: Mr. Marvin Hagler

RBG: "Marvelous Marvin", I remember him.

RC: And while we can't forget the other big guy, too, Rocky Marciano.

RBG: Oh, no, you can't forget Marciano. So, you got tremendous speed, multiple hits that we see in boxing, people who are trained to hit well...

RC: And trained to take it well, too, because every day you're in the gym in those sparring sessions, you learn how to roll and slip and you learn how to take that. And you know the average person on the street, they get a hit to the nose and their eyes water up and they can't see. In boxing, we adapt to this and we learn how to take these things.

RBG: Yes, that's in the training. But if we take a look at both sports, you know, boxing and football and we look at the aftermath of multiple concussions, some of the problems you've faced or some of the problems Junior Seau and Dave Duerson faced with depression and eventually taking their own lives—can these sports really survive in this country, Ray?

RC: Yes, absolutely, because the hunger is still there.

RBG: The "hunger" being the fans?

RC: Yes, the fans. They're still paying the big money. I don't care how much money they're doling out to all the players, they upped the seating rates and for pay per view. And as long as the hunger is there, it's going to survive. It's no different than the Roman days.

RBG: No, it's not, and it's a powerful point you're raising which is how far have we come from the Roman days?

RC: In boxing and even in football when there's a tremendous hit, the roar from the crowd is deafening. Then reality sets in after 15 to 20 seconds if the opponent isn't moving, and there's some scuffling going on as to get to them, you notice how it gets a little quieter with murmuring going on.

RBG: Oh yeah, I've been there and seen it.

RC: Now, there's a little concern, but it's that initial rush over the violence.

RBG: So as a society, are we hooked on violence?

RC: Absolutely, we are. You know, you turn on your television, and it's the first thing you see. How many nice things do you see on TV?

RBG: On the news, zero.

RC: Exactly, and, you know, it's the way it is, and it sells, and the violence...you know, in boxing, if you're a puncher, they get rewarded more because they're crowd pleasers, if they're durable and they can punch. You're going to be more viable than the guy who uses the jab and runs. People love the violence.

RBG: They love the big shot.

RC: They love the Ray Lewises. They love the linebackers that really rung the bells through the years. They're the hard hitters.

RBG: That's true in sports—the ones who can really rock the game.

RC: Well, even the goons, in hockey. I mean here's a bench player that's sent in, and people know their name.

RBG: Well, there's a word for them in hockey, the brawlers.

RC: Yeah, the goons.

RBG: My son and I were at a game, and Tulsa has a hockey team that any upstate New York high school team could beat, and if it wasn't for the fight that broke out in the third quarter, no one would've stayed for the game.

RC: There's this old saying...I went to a fight and a hockey game broke out.

RBG: That's so true.

RC: It's part of hockey, and I know they try to curb it, but it's part of the game. And again, the fans go to see the fights.

RBG: They've had some brutal brain injuries in hockey with the brawlers.

RC: Yes, they have, and somehow they try to...they let them fight it out, and if they could cut that off it would be better, but they're aware of the money issue.

RBG: It's the same thing.

RC: The brutality, again, football, one reason the guys are getting the brain damage versus the boxing is that usually they stick around longer than the average boxing career.

RBG: With longer playing careers. So stay on that point, Ray, can the referees, the coaches, the trainers, do a better job recognizing the symptoms and signs of concussions, and get them out of the game or out of the fight before there's permanent damage?

RC: No, I think they do a great job, but it's up to the players for that honesty thing. Even with those long-term contracts, you know, a professional athlete, they get to where they are through dedication and to yank them out of a game, boy, you know, usually they're not going to tell you the truth.

RBG: No, they found the same with the military. With the kids that got a concussion from an IED, is they wouldn't tell the medic that they had a concussion because they wanted to go back in and stay with their buddies.

RC: Yeah, they felt that loyalty.

RBG: So maybe the loyalty is to the fans and the team.

RC: You know honesty will always be the best policy for prevention but it's a hard thing to do. I've been there myself.

RBG: I know it's something that you've looked at in your life, but how does a player get honest?

RC: Boy, that is a tremendous question. It's one thing to do something for someone else, but do the right thing for yourself is a really tough thing to do. But if you get the help, you really need someone to help you, because you're not thinking clearly. So part of the aid is to help you through the process. And they will be helping you telling you "you have a long time to go in your life, you don't want to jeopardize it. If you rest for thirty days, you're probably going to be great. Where if you take the chance you could ruin everything." You need that counseling because you're not thinking straight on your own.

RBG: So that's something that coaches probably don't want to do if there's an incentive to get back in the ring or the football player back on the field, the hockey guy back in the rink.

RC: Well, now, I think their conscience would tell them that, but I think they need to be left to coaching and let the medical be told by the medical (doctors). Everybody do their own job to the best of their ability. The coach is really not a medical guy.

RBG: Well, look who writes his check.

RC: Boy, you are firing on all the cylinders today. There's pressure from everywhere. In boxing there's promoters, in football there's the owners, and to imply that they don't care about the players, boy, you're in big trouble. You can't imply that—it doesn't fit all. Of all the promoters and owners, you get a few bad apples, but I think most of them are pretty honorable, but I'll tell you what you start dangling big dollars and you give people long enough. They find reasons for what they do.

Check back with NeuroNotes next week for the conclusion of our interview with Ray Ciancaglini in which we will discuss the prevention of sports related brain injury.