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DR. ANSWER-EXPERT

Beware: It's concussion season, young athletes

The start of high school athletic season should warn all scholar-athletes, parents, high school coaches, teachers and administrators: It's also the start of concussion season. This column about that potentially deadly injury is from someone who's been there, former professional boxer Ray Ciancaglini. "Denver Bronco Wes Welker received another concussion on top of his recent history of sports-related Traumatic Brain Injuries. My advice: Wes should retire before he buys the long-term farm of agony and the burden his family will suffer.

"Here's my Glass Jaw Theory. After initial concussions, seconds are easier to get, the third is easier yet and so on. An example: an up-and-coming fighter who has never been KOed or taken a bad beating. Then he gets stopped. A few fights later he gets dazed or stopped again; shortly after that he suffers another TKO and boxing buffs label him a great talent but who can't take a punch. Our mythical fighter 'has a glass jaw.'

"Concussions also affect reflexes and coordination; that's why after a bad beating, a boxer is never quite



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the same. My good friend, late heavyweight champion Floyd Patterson, had that label.

"The corollary of my Glass Jaw Theory: When an athlete in any sport has had several diagnosed concussions and seems to receive them more frequently or easier, it's time to call it a career. Someone asks me at each of my presentations 'How many concussions are too many' and I explain my Glass Jaw Theory.

"In summary, if Mr. Welker continues to play in the NFL, he's taking a gamble where the wager and risk far exceed the prize. If he does the right thing and retires, that powerful role model would send a message to all young athletes: 'Make the smart choice.' If he continues his football career, the message 'Make the smart choice' will take two steps backward.

"Unfortunately, once retired athletes start suffering Chronic Traumatic

Encephalopathy (CTE) symptoms, they've bought the farm. If only I could take Wes on a walk through my Progressive Dementia Farm. As a young boxer I put a purchase offer on that farm that I can never rescind.

"The NFL should step up with mandatory time off after a concussion with increasing time-off durations for subsequent concussions, especially those within short periods of time."

Some athletes (like myself) must be protected from themselves'

"My relentless determination and desire (to succeed) defied common sense and logic. In 1971 my electroencephalogram (EEG) showed abnormal results. So the New York State Boxing Commission temporarily withheld my license to box, pending the results of a repeat EEG and review from the New York State Boxing Commissions Medical Advisory Board.

"But veteran boxers told me this could be a lengthy process with no guarantees I'd ever fight again because New York State had the toughest regulations anywhere.

"Unlike the NFL and MLB, boxing wasn't governed by a national

commission. Each state applied different rules and regulations.

"Forty-five years ago, medical professionals and sports organizations had no convincing technology and research as we have today explaining potential long-term complications of sports-related concussions. So I left protective New York State regulations to continue my career in states with fewer or no shielding rules, a common and overlooked practice in the boxing world then.

"I defiantly circumvented a system created to protect me and continued to train and book fights out of state. If you've attended my presentations or read news stories about the results you understand that a National Boxing Commission would have protected me from myself.

"High school soccer, football and hockey athletes: protective regulations are in place to protect you. Follow those rules and pay attention to medical professionals.

"And never take any foolhardy chances with your life and career after high school or college athletics."

Al Bruce of Canistota writes a weekly column for The Evening Tribune.