

Former Geneva Boxer's Message: Be 100% Honest when Dealing with Concussions

Former middle weight boxer Ray Ciancaglini knows the risks that concussions pose to athletes, and with the help of Dr. Jason Feinberg, Finger Lakes Health's Vice President of Medical Affairs and Chief Medical Officer, he's taking his message on the road. The two are educating high school and college students about the dangers of not addressing concussions properly, which can lead to Second Impact Syndrome (SIS).

SIS can occur when someone has sustained a head injury, then sustains a second head injury before symptoms have cleared from the first. Many times this occurs because the athlete has returned to competition before his or her first injury symptoms resolve. Parents and athletes may not realize that days or weeks may

be needed before a concussion is healed. When Ciancaglini suffered his first concussion, he felt something was wrong, but the boxing veterans he was surrounded by at Singers Gym in Buffalo told him it was just part of the game and that he'd need to learn to "work through it."

"They weren't giving me bad advice," he said. "They just didn't know any better back then."

Today Ciancaglini suffers from Dementia Pugilistica (Boxer's Syndrome); Parkinson's tremors; dementia, including paranoia and seclusion; insomnia; and constant headaches, all due to SIS.

Medical advances now show that one can heal from a single concussion, but it's when a person suffers a second concussion, or "second impact," before properly healing from the first, that the real damage can occur.

"I wouldn't be here today talking about concussions if I had addressed my first concussion properly," Ciancaglini said.

He tells young people to be honest about their symptoms with their coaches, trainers, and parents after suffering a head injury.

"I address 100% honesty with the kids I educate," he said. "They must be honest about their symptoms on the initial head injury to get properly evaluated. They must be 100% honest in rehab to prevent a relapse, and then 100% honest about their symptoms before returning to play to prevent SIS."

In 1999, Ciancaglini's neurologist, Dr. Heidi Schwarz, suggested he meet Dr. Feinberg, an internal medicine physician.



"I liked him right away," Ciancaglini said. "He had a personable attitude, and he would talk with me not only as a doctor, but as a friend."

Ciancaglini credits Feinberg and Schwarz, who he still sees regularly, with helping to improve his quality of life, along with good friends and family.

"I was in seclusion and Dr. Feinberg and Dr. Schwarz helped me overcome it," he said.

When Ciancaglini began crafting a plan to visit high school and college students to educate them about SIS, he immediately thought of Feinberg. "He was my number one draft pick. I had seen enough through the years to know the kids would listen to me, but also needed a doctor who could back me up," he said.

"Concussions can affect anyone, and not just athletes," said Feinberg. "Your brain is vulnerable, and concussions can occur from falling off a bike or horse, or just bumping your head on a kitchen cabinet. There's a need to educate everyone about

head injuries and how subtle they can be. It's not going to necessarily show up on a CT scan."

Ciancaglini says it's important for an athlete with a concussion to follow school protocol and the doctor's instructions, because the trouble happens when they fail to heed those directives. He encourages older teammates to be role models for younger players.

"Young kids are looking at you on the field," he said. "When they see an older athlete step back, be honest, and address a concussion properly, they will emulate your actions. The example you set could affect younger kids."

Adrenaline is another factor in the mix. Ciancaglini says sometimes adrenaline takes over and kids don't realize the hit they just took could possibly be a concussion. Adrenaline can sometimes mask the symptoms. "Don't be fooled. Take a step back and let any possible symptoms manifest, which will give you a more accurate read on your evaluation."

Recently New York State Senator Michael Nozzolio, representing the 54th Senate District, co-sponsored legislation that prohibits any students who may have suffered a concussion from participating in athletic activities until they have gone 24 hours without showing symptoms and have been authorized to return by a physician. This legislation was born from discussions between Nozzolio and Ciancaglini.

Since beginning his educational journey, Ciancaglini has reached thousands of kids and parents about SIS, a topic that has been gaining more and more press in the last few years.

"The information is everywhere now," Feinberg said. "Ray was ahead of it."

You can read more about Second Impact Syndrome, Ciancaglini, and his organization, The Second Impact, at www.thesecondimpact.com, or by searching "The Second Impact" on Facebook.

