

By [admin](#)

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BROOKHAVEN HOSPITAL

Ray Ciancaglini's Middle Way: Sports and Concussion

The “middle way” was described by the Buddha in his first discourse as abandoning the extremes for the path in the middle. I was reminded of this concept after a recent conversation with Ray Ciancaglini during which Dr. Rolf B. Gainer interviewed Ray about his thoughts on the similarities between boxing, football and resulting brain injury.

Taking the middle way is often a lonely journey since you will likely be rejected by those who set up camp in either extreme point of view. This is certainly the case with our good friend, Ray Ciancaglini, who has made it his life's purpose to educate the younger generation about concussion through his ongoing work with [The Second Impact](#), which he founded. Ray is profoundly pro-sports. It follows suit that he doesn't support the banning of any sport, including boxing and football. Many times over now, Ray has been interviewed by individuals who seek only those opinions that will support theirs, and, upon discovering Ray is pro-sports, they have either twisted his words or omitted his interview altogether. Ray has not been embraced by the groups that seek to ban the contact sports often resulting in concussion.

Likewise, Ray is often excluded from sports organizations due to his no nonsense approach to concussion education. His goal is primarily to educate the players and participants themselves since he believes strongly that it is up to the players to be honest in their own assessment of their health. Referees, coaches and trainers can help to identify symptoms, but it is ultimately the player's decision. As you can imagine, not all sports organizations are truly interested in inviting Ray to speak to their players. Ray's personal journey is powerful and cautionary despite his pro-sports stance.

Ray was in regular email communication with Sony Productions to be part of a documentary attached to the movie, *Concussion*, in which Will Smith plays Dr. Omalu, the doctor who discovered Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE) in the first brain of a football player. These talks were suddenly severed, and Ray suspects it was due to the NFL's influence and endless attempts to control the concussion narrative as it relates to its multi-billion dollar industry. Having recently seen *Concussion*, I can understand the NFL's fear since I found it to be a startling look at the effects of CTE on these men who entertain us on the football field. The brutal depiction of what these men, Mike Webster, Terry Long, Justin Strzelczyk, Andre Waters, and Dave Duerson endured as their brains began to fail them was heartbreaking to

watch. Undeterred by the far reaching power of the NFL, Ray continues on his middle way doing his important work of education on the prevention of second impact syndrome.

We could all look to Ray's life motto, "Keep punching," as well as his middle way approach to apply to our own lives. Think of how much improvement we would see in our political and cultural climate with a middle way approach.

We will be posting our entire interview with Ray in the coming weeks on NeuroNotes, our blog on traumaticbraininjury.net, so be sure to check it out!