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## LET THE KIDS PLAY!

But concussion awareness, treatment need to be part of the game

**I**n an Aug. 20 Letter to the Editor, Gerald Masters noted that Alan Brignall wrote a very inspiring article, "Teaching Safety and Life Lessons," that ran in the *Finger Lakes Times* on July 28.

Dave Marean, head football coach at Wayne Central, and John Evans of Mansfield University are both devoted coaches who for many years have taught safety on the field, especially concussion awareness and prevention and have been mentors to many youth, schooling athletes about life lessons.

I am very grateful that many changes have been and will continue to be made to make youth and high school football as safe as it can be. For example, I had the honor of speaking at the New York State Certified Football Officials Association annual

By **RAY CIANCAGLINI**  
Guest Appearance



conference about concussion awareness and am very pleased that they are proactively involved.

They have recently implemented a rule requiring that if they suspect a player has been concussed, that player

will be immediately removed for proper evaluation.

John M. Crisp's syndicated column later, headlined "Definitely a Problem," is based primarily on athletes who have sustained many concussions, some not properly diagnosed or addressed, who in the long term, have developed Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE).

I endorse and encourage athletes to play all sports. The attributes and work ethic principles developed through athletics will benefit athletes well beyond their playing days.

Concussion is an inherent risk of ALL sports competition, including not only football but others such as wrestling, lacrosse and soccer. Athletes accept that inherent risk. Concussions are hard to

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prevent. You play clean ... you play hard ... they still are going to happen.

But what IS preventable is when an athlete who has sustained a concussion sustains a second concussion before symptoms from the first injury have properly healed.

This is called Second Impact Syndrome, which carries with it a high risk of permanent brain damage and in exceptional cases can be fatal primarily among adolescents.

In my opinion, the concussion that exhibits mild symptoms can potentially be the most deceptive and dangerous. When the symptoms are mild, you are more apt to think it's not that serious, not report it and try to play through it, which puts you at risk for Second Impact Syndrome.

Early detection and being TOTALLY symptom free before returning to competition significantly reduces the risk of Second Impact Syndrome.

Numerous concussions increase the risk of developing neurological complications later in life. After your first concussion, you are more vulnerable to sustain a second and it is easier yet to get a third and so on.

The lifetime number must be monitored and extreme caution should be used when several concussions occur within a short period of time. The number of concussions an athlete can sustain before being advised to retire from contact sports remains a very controversial subject. Present studies remain inconclusive and further research is ongoing for a more definitive answer. Physicians handle each case on an individual basis with consideration given to the athlete's concussion history.

I am participating with several retired NFL players in the

Legend CTE Study at Boston University because of my history of repeated, unaddressed concussions and I am grateful that my input, working with former State Sen. Mike Nozzolo, was instrumental in getting passed into New York State Law the Concussion Management Awareness Act (2010).

This law requires that all school personnel and coaches complete a state approved concussion course bi-annually and prohibits any athlete that has suffered a concussion from participating in athletic activities until they are symptom free for 24 hours and authorized to return by a licensed physician.

Concussion education is the key. Parents and coaches need to encourage players to be totally honest about their symptoms. My own son was a football running back from youth through Geneva High School varsity. Let the kids play! But if they get their "Bell Rung" have it addressed promptly and properly.

*Ray Ciancaglini, a native of Geneva, is a former professional boxer and concussion awareness activist. His life story was featured nationally by ABC News and has been the subject of numerous award-winning stories. He has battled Parkinson's Syndrome and Dementia Pugilistica for many years as a direct result of numerous untreated concussions he suffered. He was instrumental in getting passed into New York State Law, The Concussion Management Awareness Act, for which he was honored with the New York Executive Chamber Award and the Rochester Hickok Hero Award. He also founded the Second Impact Concussion Awareness Program ([www.thesecondimpact.com](http://www.thesecondimpact.com)) and tours high schools, colleges universities, NFL Player Development Camps and Youth Organizations lecturing athletes about the possible ramifications of not addressing concussions properly.*