

Ray Ciancaglini Has the Heart of a Champion

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We recently had the opportunity to interview Ray Ciancaglini about his work in preventing brain injuries from sports, specifically injuries which are caused by multiple concussions on top of an undiagnosed first concussion. Ray reflected on his boxing career and his own experience with concussions in Part 1 of this interview. The following is Part 2 and tells the story of Ray's second career as an advocate for the prevention of sports related brain injuries.

"I never gave up."

After letting go of his lifelong dream to be a championship boxer, Ray made the decision to never give up, and he emerged from the difficult period which he called "the worst seclusion". He was going to keep punching in life. Ray took a swing at a new goal of becoming a gym teacher and started his studies at the local college. Concentration and memory problems prevented him from achieving this goal. However, an old boxing promoter got him a job, and things started to look up as he began dating the woman who would later become his wife, Patti.

"That's my left hook—my best punch."

Ray describes his wife, Patti in this way, "That's my left hook—my best punch." With Patti by his side, Ray would deal with his toughest fight yet. At age 44, after experiencing tremors in his hands and worsening memory problems, Ray was diagnosed with Parkinson Syndrome. The devastation of this diagnosis due to the aftermath of his undiagnosed multiple concussions would not knock out Ray Ciancaglini. Although he was forced to retire from his job at Eastman Kodak he would focus on what he called "the only thing I could do was prevent another athlete from going down that same path".



"You always try to make something good out of something bad."

Ray has a perspective on the world that is entirely too rare. Rather than a cliché, he truly lives out the idea that one's attitude about what happens to us is the most important. No one would have faulted Ray if he would have lived out the rest of his life privately dealing with his illness. Ray would not be counted out, and would keep on punching. He knew he had to do everything he could to prevent this from happening to other athletes.

Ray founded The Second Impact, a non-profit organization with a mission to increase awareness about the signs and effects of concussion. Ray educates and inspires people at speaking events across the country. He does this out of his passion to help others, and not for profitable gain.

Instrumental in passing the Concussion Management Awareness Act in New York that requires student athletes sit out for a minimum of twenty four hours after sustaining concussion, Ray continues to work with legislators to protect athletes from concussion and other sports related injuries. Thanks to Ray's early work in the state of New York to pass legislation that protects student athletes, other states adopted similar laws, and, currently, all fifty states have youth sport concussion laws. However, these laws vary by state in terms of what type of professional is authorized to determine return to play for the athlete. Currently, there is a bill at the Federal level in the House of Representatives called "[Protecting Student Athletes From Concussions Act of 2015](#)." Ray plans to keep fighting to spread his powerful message of prevention.

"You challenge a concussion; you're going to get beat."

Unlike some other advocates for brain injury and concussion prevention, Ray makes it clear that he is "pro-sports," and this is best expressed in his own words:

"If I had it all to do over again, I would still pursue a boxing career...absolutely. I would still compete with the same tenacity and dedication that it takes to be a champion. The only thing that I would do differently is that I would immediately get medical attention for any symptoms of injury that my body was warning me needed to be addressed. With the education that we have today about concussions, the word is out and the help is there. You challenge a concussion; you're going to get beat. Athletes need to make the smart choice!"

Ray has devoted his life to concussion education and research. With the true heart of a champion, he shares his very personal life lessons in the hope of helping others. Ray's generosity and public sharing will continue as a legacy. He has been involved for many years with the Center for the Study of Traumatic Encephalopathy at Boston University School of Medicine and has donated his brain for study in their research into the long-term effects of multiple concussions. Ray is one of those people who will continue to give. We are honored to share his story with our readers. Every time we speak with Ray or exchange email, he closes the conversation with "keep on punching". It's a great idea.

We encourage you to visit Ray's website: www.thesecondimpact.com to learn more about his work in the area of prevention. At the Neurologic Rehabilitation Institute at Brookhaven Hospital and through NeuroNotes we share Ray's intense focus on prevention through education and awareness.