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The Invisible Illness - Concussion Awareness in Youth Sports

Many people associate concussions with noticeable trauma to the head. That is not my story. My first concussion occurred playing girls' soccer, a sport I loved. In the spring of 2016, at the age of twelve, I got my first concussion when a player's elbow slammed into the back of my head. I remember the impact hurting, but pain never stopped the game. "Walk it off" was always the motto in girls' soccer. I continued to play competitive soccer which resulted in multiple injuries. It wasn't until later that my progressive symptoms required visits to medical specialists and numerous tests. Could this be a concussion?

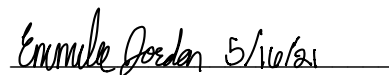
Yes, in fact it was, and I was diagnosed with post-concussive syndrome (PCS). Sadly, no one understood the signs - not my coaches, referees, or even the doctors recognized my health symptoms as an injury to the brain. Eventually, my debilitating symptoms took me off the soccer field, out of school and into a long, 16-month health journey.

Today, I'm happy to share that I am fully healed. I am now using my story to support others currently battling concussions and to help prevent head injuries in youth sports. That means educating coaches, referees, teachers, parents, and others about the signs of concussions and helping teenagers play safe.

Since my recovery, I have been spreading awareness about concussions in my community. I have shared my story with those who will listen including youth sports teams and girl scout troops. I was working with Rhode Island Senator Frank Lombardi to discuss concussion legislation requiring trained officials, coaches and other medical professionals on the field during games.

Although some of these efforts have been put on hold with the recent pandemic, the use of social media has helped elevate my voice. March was Traumatic Brain Injury Awareness Month and during that time I was able to share posts educating the community.

I hope to continue my efforts by traveling throughout Rhode Island spreading awareness to teams, coaches, officials, and parents on preventing and recognizing concussions. My goal is that concussions are taken more seriously so youth and adults will recognize the symptoms and work together to protect young athletes as they participate in sports.

 Emmilee Jordan 5/16/21

Signature/Date