

7 middle, high school football deaths in a month prompt warnings: 'Protect your kids'

Players' deaths stemmed from heatstroke to concussions, other injuries

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The [football-related deaths](#) of seven middle and high school students in August alone is prompting warnings from parents and others to take sport safety measures more seriously.

The seven deceased include 13-year-old Cohen Craddock of West Virginia, 16-year-old Caden Tellier of Alabama, 15-year-old Jayvion Taylor of Virginia, 14-year-old Semaj Wilkins of Alabama, 15-year-old Robert James Gillon III of Florida, 16-year-old Leslie Noble of Maryland and 15-year-old Ovet Gomez-Regalado of Kansas.

The circumstances of their deaths range from [heatstroke to chest pains to head injuries](#).

"I refer to him as Mr. Personality, great kid, wanted everybody to like him. He just wanted to be happy," Cohen's father, Robert Craddock, told Fox News Digital of his son. "Loved sports, hunting, fishing, he was a very social person, very big into church. Just a great, great kid, I couldn't be more proud of him as a father."

WEST VIRGINIA MIDDLE SCHOOL FOOTBALL PLAYER DIES FROM HEAD INJURY DURING PRACTICE



The middle and high school football players who died in August include 13-year-old Cohen Craddock of West Virginia, 16-year-old Caden Tellier of Alabama, 15-year-old Robert James Gillon III of Florida, 15-year-old Jayvion Taylor of Virginia, 15-year-old Ovet Gomez-Regalado of Kansas, 14-year-old Semaj Wilkins of Alabama and 16-year-old Leslie Noble of Maryland. (Thomas A. Ferrara/Newsday RM/Facebook/GoFundMe/Selma Funeral Home)

Robert Craddock said Cohen was going on his second year of football when he sustained a deadly head injury at practice on Aug. 23.

"He was at football practice, just normal practice. Another boy was making a block. Cohen got tripped up, and he hit the ground. When he hit the ground, his head struck the ground. And that's what caused the head injury that ultimately led to his death," Robert explained, adding later that he "never dreamed" he could be in the position he is in now.

"It's hard to wrap my head around," the grieving father said.

ALABAMA 14-YEAR-OLD DIES AFTER COLLAPSING AT FOOTBALL PRACTICE: 'HE JUST HAD A LOVE FOR SPORTS'



Since his son's death, Robert has made it his mission to get football teams to mandate Guardian Caps, which are padded football helmet covers, for players. Robert said that the caps do not alter the helmets themselves but add an additional layer of protection.

"Protect your kids at all costs."

— Robert Craddock

"Protect your kids at all costs," he said when asked if he has advice for other parents whose children play football, "whether it's stepping up, speaking to the coaches about doing different techniques ... or purchase the Guardian Caps on your own, let's do everything in our power to protect our kids."

The same day Cohen was injured, Tellier also received a head injury in the third quarter of his team's winning game against Southern Academy in Selma, Alabama. He died the next day.



"Our boy, Caden Tellier has met Jesus face to face. We appreciate all of your prayers and we covet them for the hard days ahead," Caden's mother, Arsella Slagel Tellier, wrote in a Facebook post last month. "Everyone who knows Caden has known kindness, generosity and love, and true to his nature, he is giving of himself one more time. Lives have been touched by the way he lived and now lives will be saved through his passing. We will walk out these next few days alongside him in his earthly body knowing that his spirit is rejoicing in heaven."

[HIGH SCHOOL QUARTERBACK DIES AFTER BRAIN INJURY IN OPENING NIGHT GAME](#)

The [Wetherington Law Firm in Georgia](#) says the seven teen deaths in August "have raised concerns about the safety of youth football, with calls for better equipment, training, and awareness of the risks posed by extreme heat," and the firm is offering legal support to families impacted by such tragedies.

"These things are incredibly preventable. We have laws in the books already."

— Matt Wetherington

Attorney Matt Wetherington, the firm's founder, said school football is "still the wild west" in terms of mandating safety measures to protect kids from life-altering or deadly injuries. He explained that coaches – and more broadly, [school boards and districts](#) – are not following through on necessary protections for kids, even if they are state-mandated like those that already exist in Georgia, including the Georgia Return to Play Act, Heat Safety Guidelines and Sudden Cardiac Arrest Prevention Act.



"Football, obviously, is sacred in Georgia," Wetherington said, but it is not "special" in the sense that school districts and boards are going out of their way to create more safety measures and awareness for students and parents despite the level of danger involved in such a highly physical contact sport.

*"School boards and the state are responsible for the safety of student-athletes."
— Matthew Wetherington*

"They have a legal duty to ensure compliance with safety protocols, like having cooling stations, emergency action plans and immediate medical response readiness. Failure to comply can lead to preventable injuries or deaths," he added.

Marty McNair, father of 19-year-old Jordan McNair of Randallstown, Maryland, who collapsed during football practice in 2018 and died of heatstroke, is standing up for other families to prevent similar tragedies from occurring. McNair was a player for the University of Maryland at the time.

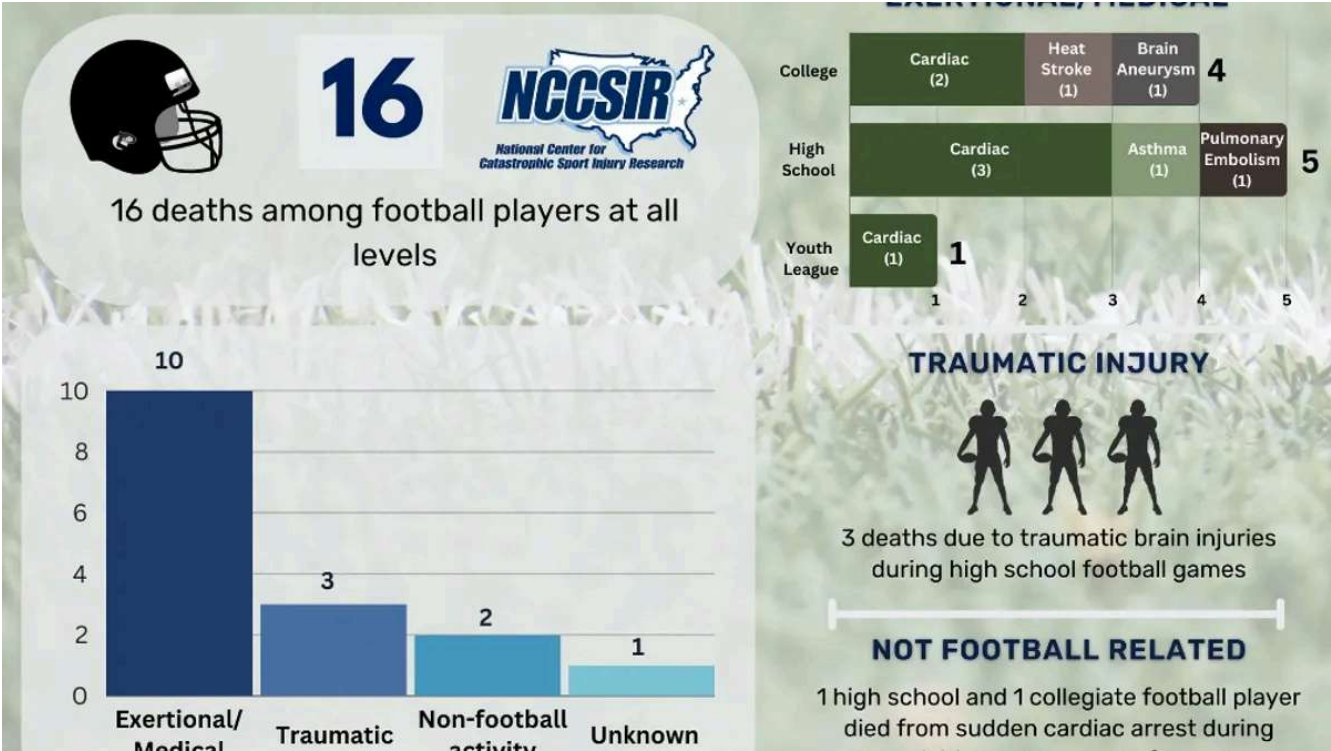
"As a father who tragically lost my son, Jordan, to a preventable heat-related injury on the football field, my heart goes out to the families who have suffered the unimaginable pain of losing their children in recent tragedies. I know firsthand the devastation, and no parent should ever have to endure such a loss," McNair told Fox News Digital in a statement.



He added that as the 2024 fall football season begins, his "advice to parents is to always prioritize your child's safety."

"Be active in understanding the safety measures in place where your child plays. Ask questions about hydration protocols, heat management, and Emergency Action Plans. Make sure your child knows it's okay to speak up if they feel unwell or unsafe on the field. Teach them that their health is far more important than any game," he said. "At The Jordan McNair Foundation, we're here to help parents, athletes, and coaches be better equipped with the knowledge and tools to prevent these tragedies. Losing Jordan changed my life, and our mission is to ensure no other family has to face what we did. Stay involved, stay informed, and above all, make sure your child knows that their safety comes first – always."

The National Center for Catastrophic Sport Injury Research reported 16 total football-related deaths in 2023. Nine of those 16 victims were in middle or high school.



In the months of July and August over the past three academic years, there were six football deaths in 2021, three in 2022 and two in 2023, according to NCCSIR statistics.

For middle and high school students, traumatic deaths (head injuries, spine injuries, etc.) accounted for four deaths in 2019, zero deaths in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, four deaths in 2021, three deaths in 2022 and two deaths in 2023. Exertional deaths (including heat stroke, cardiac arrest, sickling, etc.) among middle and high school students accounted for nine deaths in 2019, seven in 2020, 11 in 2021, five in 2022 and five in 2023, according to NCCSIR.

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Table IV. shows heat stroke deaths by year, and there are years with high numbers, such as 5 and 6, just not in the past decade. July and August are when most occur of course, so the 3 that we’ve captured so far this year in middle/high school is similar to years 2020 (4) and 2021 (3).

While all 50 states have some form of laws aimed at preventing sports-related concussions, heat-stroke related laws are rarer. States that do have such laws to prevent heat stroke include Florida, Texas, California, New Jersey and North Carolina.

