

Eugene F. Teevens Testimony before

Congress of United States

House of Representatives

Committee of Energy and Commerce

May 13, 2016

Thank you committee members for allowing me to address the issue of concussions in youth sports.

As a member of the football coaching profession for over 35 years I have worked at a number of colleges and universities and have instructed young men on campuses and in high school and youth football camps every year.

Football is a physical sport and the risk of injury is well known and documented. There has been an increased focus on the safety of the game particularly in the area of concussive head trauma. With concern for the health of my players at Dartmouth, I opted to eliminate all full contact live tackling of a teammate in all spring practice, pre-season and in season drills five years ago.

At that time, my decision was questioned heavily and not well received by my peers. The decision was not made lightly however. I weighed the possibility of putting our players at a competitive disadvantage and having them poorly prepared for full contact on game day; but believed that we could simulate game situations, without compromising performance, while reducing injury risk.

With the help of the Dartmouth Football staff, we developed a practice plan that emphasized tackling technique and situations that our players would find themselves in. We did this with greater

specificity and repetition than we ever could in live tackling sessions. We use partners, pads, dummies, sleds and a mobile tackling device "MVP" developed with Dartmouth College's Thayer School of Engineering to teach, develop and practice proper form and execution.

There has been some misunderstanding in the general public about our lack of tackling. We may, tackle more of than any other team in the country, we just never tackle each other. Our sole opportunity for full live tackling occurs on game day. I tell each of our recruited student athletes that they will never tackle or be tackled by a Dartmouth Football player during their career.

The resulting injury reduction from contact related practices has been significant, even at a time when concussive injury awareness, reporting, self-reporting by student athletes and their teammates is as extensive as it has ever been. Peripheral injuries and missed practice time due to injury have all dropped and has allowed our most talented players to be on the practice field and in game situations more regularly than before we switched to a non-live tackling operation.

The past two seasons our record has been 17-3 and we earned a share of the Ivy League title this past fall. The practice protocol we follow has not hampered our development, quite the opposite. Dartmouth is a nationally ranked football program with a Division 1 leading defense. Our missed tackles per game is at an all-time low and we have had zero defensive concussive head injuries for the 2015 season and through the recently concluded spring practice session.

The Ivy League, under the leadership of Robin Harris, and by the unanimous vote of all Ivy League Head Football Coaches recently eliminated all live tackling practices during the football season. I believe every college conference in the country could adopt this same policy without any negative impact on their athletes or the caliber of play. It is however, extremely difficult for individual coaches to take such a step.

For the past three years I have worked with "Practice like Pros," a group advocating reduction of contact in high school and youth football. I have spoken with hundreds of high school and youth football coaches about our practice approach. Questions that are frequently asked pertain to developing toughness, tackling skills, player evaluation and how to convince other coaches to try a different method of practicing. My response is simply the skills that we teach are the same ones first-time players need to learn, practice and master. It is a "crawl, walk, run" progression. Those who want to "try" football are demonstrating the "toughness" many feel is needed to play. As coaches we can develop the confidence and skills needed to block and tackle gradually and not overwhelm "first timers" by putting them in extreme situations before they are comfortable and prepared to engage in them.

As a profession, we are conservative and at times hesitant to change. We all care deeply about our sport, our players and the wonderful lessons and life experiences it can provide. This is an important time in the long history of the game. As coaches, we need to decide whether we will wait for change, or become agents of change that must be made.

What many are referring to as the "Dartmouth Way" is a viable means of reducing the amount of contact that players of any levels are exposed to. Understanding, teaching and practicing the most injurious aspects of the game, in a controlled environment, will eliminate countless "hits" to young men at all levels during the course of their careers and will create a safer environment for those who choose to play the game.

Again, thank you for affording me this opportunity and best wishes as you carry out your important work.