

## SPORTS & HEALTH

**“Gone are the days when you used to think, ‘Suck it up. Get back in there.’”**

JIM SMREKAR, *athletic director, Elk Grove Unified School District*



Brian Baer Special to The Bee

**Oak Ridge High's Ryan Adams chases** Rocklin High quarterback Jimmy Laughrea on Friday. Laughrea was later benched by the referee for a possible concussion. New rules allow game officials to make that kind of call.

# State high schools tackle concussions in football

BY BOBBY CAINA CALVAN  
*bcalvan@sacbee.com*

The hit happened early in Friday's game between the Rocklin High School Thunder and the Oak Ridge High School Trojans. Jimmy Laughrea, Rocklin's quarterback, tried to shrug off the blow.

But he began forgetting plays, calling one in the huddle but running another at the line of scrimmage. He had no memory of the touchdown he threw in the fourth

quarter that put the Thunder back in the game.

Soon after, the 6-foot-2 senior was hunched behind the bench, vomiting into a trash can.

A referee made the call: possible concussion.

Laughrea was pulled from the game.

“We were only down by a touchdown. It was the fourth quarter. I wanted to go back in to play,” Laughrea recalled. “But it wasn't

up to me.”

Precisely the point.

With heightened concern over brain injuries in high school sports, Laughrea's pleas to stay in went unheeded.

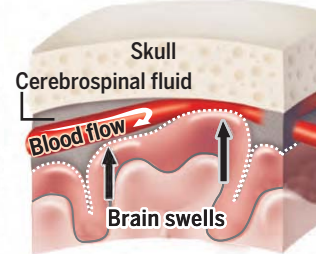
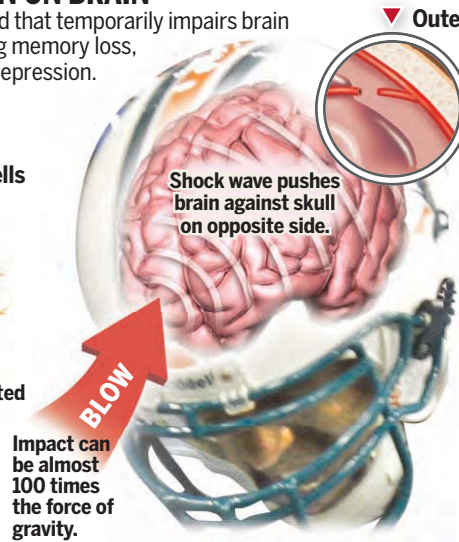
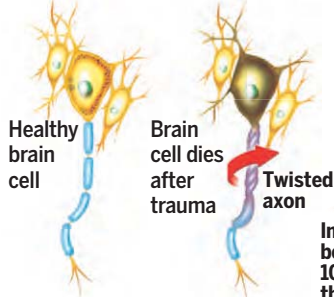
Beginning this season, the California Interscholastic Federation, the state's governing body for high school athletics, has put in place rules on how coaches, trainers and referees should respond to sus-  
**CONCUSSIONS** | Back page, A14

## IMPACT OF CONCUSSION ON BRAIN

A concussion – a blow to the head that temporarily impairs brain function – can cause debilitating memory loss, chronic headaches and clinical depression.

### What happens

▼ Forces twist and break the long, slender axons of brain cells that carry electrical impulses.



Sources: American College of Sports Medicine, Denver Post, Riddell, Medscape, University of North Carolina Center for the Study of Retired Athletes

Hiram Henriquez McClatchy Tribune

# Concussions: Medical release required to take field again

## FROM PAGE A1

pected concussions. A key rule requires a signed medical release before a student-athlete can return to play.

While coaches could always bench a student suspected of having a concussion, the new rules give referees broader authority to sideline an athlete.

The effort in California is part of a national campaign by the National Federation of State High School Associations to promote better understanding of concussions.

It took years for the National Football League and key college conferences to tackle the issue. Now, high school leagues are hoping to

show that they, too, are taking concussions and other brain injuries more seriously.

“It’s no longer up to the student-athlete. It’s about a medical professional determining the health of an athlete, not the kid who wants to get back in the game,” said Jim Smrekar, the athletic director for the Elk Grove Unified School District.

“Gone are the days when you used to think, ‘Suck it up. Get back in there.’”

A concussion results when the brain’s soft tissue slams into the walls of the skull – most often from a sudden blow to the head or body. The trauma impairs brain function.

For young athletes, a severe blow can cause big damage to their still-developing brains, leading to learning disabilities and changes in behavior.

According to estimates from the 2009-10 High School Sports-Related Injury Surveillance Study, more than 140,000 high school athletes suffer a concussion each year. Other researchers say that estimate is conservative. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that between 1.4 million and 3.6 million sports and recreation-related concussions occur each year, the majority of them in high school sports.

Few schools track the in-

jury, and many student-athletes are reluctant to admit they’re hurt for fear of being taken out of a game.

Head injuries are often difficult to spot, particularly by untrained eyes, said Dr. Gina Lokna, a sports medicine physician with the UC Davis Health System.

Student-athletes “need to be checked often for the subtle symptoms,” she said. “We need to be letting kids and parents know that they are better off taking a day off.”

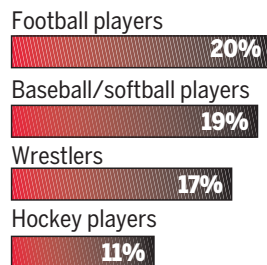
The California Interscholastic Federation and its Sacramento Section have been holding training sessions during the summer to educate coaches, trainers and game of-

## SECOND-IMPACT SYNDROME

Second-impact syndrome is a rare – and often fatal – condition that can occur if an athlete returns to play too soon after a concussion.

### Young players at risk

Athletes under 21 are the most vulnerable. Percentage who suffer concussion yearly:



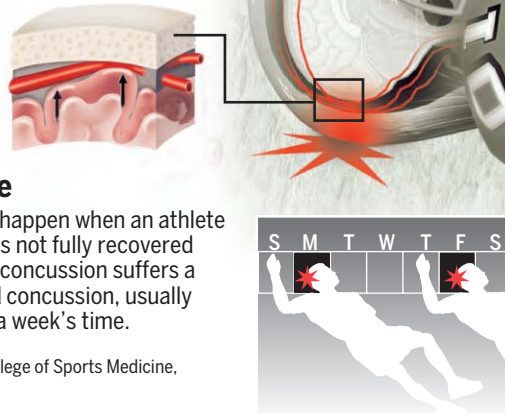
Sources: American Academy of Neurology, American College of Sports Medicine, Denver Post, Riddell, Medscape.

### What happens

- Causes massive swelling of brain.
- Cuts off flow of blood to brain.
- May lead to death or irreparable brain damage.

### Cause

- Can happen when an athlete who has not fully recovered from a concussion suffers a second concussion, usually within a week's time.



Hiram Henriquez, South Florida Sun-Sentinel, and Pat Carr and Laura Pearl, McClatchy Tribune

### ABOUT THE RULE

#### Bylaw 313, as adopted by the California Interscholastic Federation:

A student-athlete who is suspected of sustaining a concussion or head injury in a practice or game shall be removed from competition at that time for the remainder of the day. A student-athlete who has been removed from play may not return to play until the athlete is evaluated by a licensed health care provider trained in the evaluation and management of concussion and receives written clearance to return to play from that health care provider.

ficials about the new rules – and drill them about the warning signs of brain trauma.

Besides football, concussions happen in any sport where bodies collide, such as soccer, basketball, baseball and even water polo, where a sudden hit from an elbow can produce serious damage.

“Football is not the only sport to worry about,” said Tim Healy, the athletic director at Granite Bay High School.

But as a marquee sport, football attracts the most notice. Over the years, sports equipment manufacturers have redesigned helmets and other gear to better protect against concussions and other

injuries.

Tight budgets, however, have prevented some schools from buying the latest equipment or paying for innovative injury prevention programs.

Until two years ago, Granite Bay High ran a program called “Head Minders,” which it used to diagnose athletes for concussions.

Before taking part in a sports program, each student’s cognitive functions were evaluated to establish a baseline, which was used to compare the athlete’s condition after suffering an apparent concussion.

The program was eliminated, Healy said, because of scarce funds.

In Friday’s game, Laughrea’s symptoms – vomiting, memory loss – were obvious, prompting a referee to intervene.

It wasn’t the first concussion suffered by the quarterback, who dreams of playing for Boise State. Two years ago, he took a similar hit, yet kept silent for fear of being taken out of that season’s final game.

“He’s a fierce competitor,” said his father, David Laughrea. “He’s not the kind of kid who’ll say, ‘I’m not feeling good. Take me out.’ He just wants to play.”

After the game, the Laughreas went to the emer-

gency room for a CT scan. As of Tuesday, it was unclear if Jimmy would be playing in Friday’s game against Whitney High.

“In the whole scheme of things, the game’s not that critical,” the father said. “I don’t know if a high school athlete has the ability to differentiate between just a game and permanent brain damage. If you give the athlete the choice, they’re going to play all the time.”

Call *The Bee’s* Bobby Caina Calvan, (916) 321-1067.