

Today wouldn't have been possible without the generous donation of the time and expertise from our three presenters - Professors Barry Willer and Gary Browne - who've just returned from the 5th International Consensus Conference on Concussion in Sport held in Berlin - and Dr. Julia Treleaven. Can you please join me in thanking them, in advance?

Today *is* a fundraiser for Brain Injury Australia so I wanted to – *very quickly* – tell you where your...registration will be going. Alongside concussion in sport, Brain Injury Australia drives multi-year public education campaigns devoted to: the leading cause of death and disability in children who have been abused – *inflicted* traumatic brain injury, sometimes called “shaken baby syndrome” - the leading cause of traumatic brain injury across the developed world, falls - due to the ageing of our population; people with a brain injury in the criminal justice system (as many as 80 per cent of Australia's adult prisoners report brain injury); and women, family violence and brain injury (1 woman dies every week in Australia the result of family violence. THREE women are *hospitalised* every week with a traumatic brain injury the result of family violence).

With the cessation of Australian Government funding to 12 national disability peak bodies in mid-2015, Brain Injury Australia – to use a buzzword from marketing – Brain Injury Australia has had to...pivot into an information and referral clearinghouse on all matters brain injury, specifically to optimise its constituents' access to the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

The Concussion in Sport page of our website - which I know many of you would have visited in preparation for today - is one of the building blocks of that enterprise.

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The very essence of a curtain-raiser/ a support act is to know when to exit the stage, and make way for the main attractions. So, I promise I won't keep you – further – for long.

But I want to – briefly – go back to taws on the concussion conversation, the concussion...controversy. The former journalist deep down inside where I live keeps needing to ask...why now?

Because I think it's safe to say the world's first concussion was had long before David clocked Goliath, before Cain cleaned Abel's clock, before the first man to fall over, before the fall of man, his fall from grace, that concussions have been forever, since humans have formed fists or held clubs. Or held disagreements.

To my untrained mind, nothing about *the* challenges to the diagnosis and acute management of concussion really could have changed all that much; for instance, the macho-competitive warrior culture of sport still positively discourages disclosure. What has changed – and this is hardly a newsflash for any of you – is the white hot conversation around some of the potential chronic consequences of mutiple concussions, particularly when poorly...managed.

I think it's uncontroversial to say that concussion would not now be the hottest topic in sports medicine, if not sports overall – *indeed*, this Training Day would not be taking place - if it weren't for the four and a half thousand retired gridiron players who sued the National Football League in the United States, and settled for around a billion dollars Australian. (The nub of their case was that the NFL was "aware of the evidence and the risks associated with repetitive traumatic brain injuries virtually at the inception, but deliberately ignored and actively concealed the information". The "risks [the retired players] associated with repetitive traumatic brain injuries" included QUOTE "early onset of Alzheimer's Disease, dementia, depression, deficits in cognitive functioning, reduced processing speed, attention, and reasoning, loss of

memory, sleeplessness, moods swings, personality changes, and the debilitating and latent disease known as Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy“.)

To state the bleeding obvious, sport is big business and where big money's at stake, big fear is bound to follow. Make no mistake, Australia's so-called "collision" sports have enough to fear from class action litigation – a case, perhaps, of both *when* rather than *if* and whether it's "successful", or not. But if our sports marketeers are truly playing the long game, surely the sum of all fears is some of our deep, more sweeping social changes – smaller family size, more risk-averse parenting styles, when you've got fewer children to...spare. (A recent survey of children's hospitals in the United States found that, while concussion presentations had more than doubled in recent years, admissions remained stable). Add to that an increasingly competitive academic environment for children, and at ever-younger ages, baby boomer parents living in morbid fear of dementia, and so on.

It's the legions of would-be "soccer mums" pouring over the horizon - voting with their children's feet and their family's wallets – that our major sports administrators really have to worry about. (And in using that expression, I don't mean to imply for a moment that soccer – football - is either concussion-safe, let alone concussion-free.)

As both a reformed helicopter parent of would-be free range children and as a disability advocate...in an era of galloping *inactivity*...I feel obliged to counter the trend to "cottonwoolling" children; to drive home, what, both a responsible and a REALIST message; that concussion – whether inside or outside of sport – is one of the...ordinary hazards of the life of the physical, and that 80 to 90 per cent result in an uneventful recovery within 10-14 days of injury. The 10 to 20 per cent of eventful recoveries...notwithstanding, the former journalist inside me also tells me that perception is everything. And today's typical parent will be swiftly unforgiving of any sport as soon as she – or he – suspects it's playing chicken with their child's brain.

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You might think this means I've been embedded with the concussion guidelines of the competing sports, and could point out the most subtle of differences between them. Well, no. Whether a parent, a coach, a weekend warrior or a sports physician, navigating the shoals of the myriad concussion protocols must be a dizzying affair. Just one example, the recently released joint Australian Institute of Sport/ Australian Medical Association Position Statement recommends children and adolescents aged 18 and under "not return to contact training, sport or play less than 14 days from the resolution of all symptoms".

(You'd hope the Statement's authors were aware of the evidence from research for the chilling effect of mandatory exclusion periods on players" disclosure of concussion – that adults, or children, if they know that a concussion will rule them out of play for fixed period, are less likely to disclose symptoms.)

So, does that mean that a Position Statement prepared by two such august health and sporting bodies trumps those prepared by the individual sports themselves? Perhaps. Perhaps not. Brain Injury Australia's interests lie elsewhere. Elite, professional sport is slowly, but surely, getting its act together – with missteps along the way – in concussion assessment and management. (And I hope that it's driven more by the carrot of player health and safety than the stick of financial penalty or threat of litigation.) Regardless, for as long as parts or pockets of the toughen-up-princess-get-back-in-the-game warrior culture abide, Brain Injury Australia will persist with grassroots education – built around its "Five Rs" of concussion: "Recognise the injury; Removal from play; Referral to a doctor; Rest and then Return to play".

And I trust that today's crash course will inject some cooling commonsense into what's become a hot, and crowded, place.

It's now an honour to introduce to you Barry Willer, Professor of Psychology in the Department of Psychiatry at the University at Buffalo in western New York and is

director of research at the University's Concussion Management Clinic. Please welcome Professor Willer...

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