



## KEEP YOUR HEAD IN THE GAME ... OR, NOT

BY SHALEEK BLACKBURN

**According to the Centers for Disease Control**, each year U.S. emergency rooms treat more than 170,000 sports- and recreation-related traumatic brain injuries (TBIs), including concussions, which have been on the rise in recent years, particularly among young people. The activities with the greatest numbers of TBIs include football, basketball and soccer.

According to Dr. Michael Shepard, an Orange Orthopedic surgeon, leading sports medicine expert and long-time member of the California Interscholastic Federation, the rules for diagnosing concussions have changed.

“The biggest difference in concussions now versus 20 years ago when I played high school football here in Orange County—once your head felt pretty clear, the [coaches] just put you back in,” Dr. Shepard says. “I think now there’s been a very big push to realize that’s not the way to treat a concussion.”

Although “playing through the pain” has long been celebrated as a sign of a dedicated athlete, that’s a dangerous position to take, Dr. Shepard says.

“There are some laws of nature that we have to follow. If you break your clavicle, it’s going to take a certain number of weeks before you can play safely,” he says. “Sometimes the coaches and players feel like the rules don’t apply to them and they want to push the boundaries and see if they can come back sooner.”

So when is the appropriate time to sideline a player suspected of incurring a concussion or other serious injury, and who decides when they are fit to play again?

“You have to be more aware, look at all the different subtle symptoms [for a concussion]. It’s not just a headache,” Dr. Shepard says. “You have to think about blurred vision, difficulty adapting to light

“There’s been an explosion in year-round sports participation, particularly in California, where people have access to year-round sports. That means, the more kids play the more kids get hurt.

—Dr. Shepard

and concentration, for example.”

Regardless if it’s a head injury or a torn ACL, players should never go back in the game until they’ve taken the proper time to heal, Dr. Shepard says. Also critical, he says, is having a certified athletic trainer on staff who can give an unbiased, official medical opinion and determine when returning to play is safe.

### 3 TIPS TO AVOID SPORTS INJURIES

#### Be careful with year-round sports

Especially important for “throwing” or upper-extremity athletes like swimmers or water polo players

#### Cross train

Play different sports to work different attributes, different muscle groups

#### Remember to rest

It can help prevent injuries in the long run



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