

Ohio football player, apparent suicide victim, complained of concussions

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5 December 2014

Ohio State University football player Kosta Karageorge was found dead from an apparent self-inflicted gunshot on November 30, four days after he was reported missing. According to Sgt. Richard Weiner of the Columbus, Ohio police department, Karageorge's body was found in a trash bin near his apartment and police recovered a handgun at the scene.

Karageorge, a senior, who had competed as a wrestler on the Ohio State wrestling team for three years, joined the football team and played defensive tackle this season. According to the *Columbus Dispatch*, his mother Susan told the police last Wednesday she had received a text message from him that said, "I am sorry if I am an embarrassment but these concussions have my head all [messed] up."

In a telephone interview Friday, his older sister Sophia told the *Dispatch* that Karageorge had sustained a concussion as recently as September and had had "at least four or five" concussions in his life.

"He had a pretty bad concussion last fall and he told me about differences in his behavior," she had said. "Just, like, confusion, disorientation, being unable to focus, mood swings—not feeling like himself, basically, not feeling quite right."

According to media reports, Karageorge had a history of concussions. Karageorge's teammate Michael Bennett, a senior tackle, said Karageorge "never reported them." Bennett indicated that Karageorge's concussion issues came from both his years on the Ohio State wrestling team and his first year as a scout team defensive lineman on the football team.

"We knew he had a lot of concussions. But you never knew he was depressed or anything like that. I think he was one of the most positive out of everybody, which goes to show you can't tell when something sneaks up. There's no way to notice it."

Bennett said he and his teammates "were worried," but never saw any concussion side effects from the 6 foot 5, 285 pound Karageorge.

"He never reported them," Bennett told the media in a conference call Monday. "Kosta ... was the toughest guy I ever met. He must have been dealing with a lot of stuff internally. He was so appreciative of everything and so hard working, when he got one during practice or something like that, he wouldn't tell anybody. We would tell him to take it easy, if you want to sit out nobody is going to judge you, anything like that, because those are serious. But his mentality was always never quit, never back down from a challenge."

Because last Saturday's game against the University of Michigan was Ohio State's last home game, all the team's seniors accompanied by their parents were given a special introduction. Kosta Karageorge was the last senior introduced as the crowd of more than 100,000 fell silent while his image on a police flier appeared on the stadium video screen, which appealed for help in finding the missing player.

Franklin County, Ohio coroner Dr. Anahi Ortiz on Monday ordered a special examination to look for signs of traumatic brain injury. Dr. Ortiz told NBC News that the special examination, in which a pathologist will examine slides of the player's brain, was not routine but has been conducted in other cases. In this case, she said, it was because of Karageorge's reported history of concussions and because he played football and wrestled.

At a Monday press conference, Ohio State football coach Urban Meyer announced that he would not address Karageorge's medical history because of student confidentiality, but he did compliment Ohio State's medical personnel. "I can say this, this is the best group of medical people I've ever been around,

the way they handle their business and the attention to detail. “

A growing body of research has shown that repeated concussions can cause permanent brain damage, and organized football has come under harsh criticism for ignoring the danger for too long.

The National Football League (NFL), which for years disputed evidence that its players had a high rate of brain damage, has admitted in federal court in documents submitted this year that it expects nearly a third of retired players to develop long-term cognitive problems and that these conditions are likely to emerge at “notably younger ages” than in the general population.

In this lawsuit NFL players have claimed that the league engaged in a “concerted effort of deception and denial” in its treatment of concussions, and that it had intentionally hidden from them the danger of concussions and resulting brain damage.

In college sports, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) has proposed spending \$70 million on a program that would monitor athletes for brain trauma. This paltry sum pales in comparison to the nearly \$1 billion in yearly revenue that college football programs generate.

The “win at all costs” pressure on athletes who compete at elite college football programs, and the hoped for rewards that go with it, mirror similar pressures that impact professional football players. Players will often risk their health, as coaches and administrators or owners look the other way.

Ohio State operates one of the largest and most lucrative college sports programs in the US. *USA Today* calculated that OSU’s athletic department program had revenue of \$139, 639,307 in 2013, the fifth largest total for any public university. SB Nation (Sports Blog Nation) calculates that the Ohio State athletic department was the biggest money-winner in college sports last year, with a profit of \$23,612,978. *Forbes* magazine rated the football team as worth \$83 million in 2013, the ninth most valuable in the country.

In a 2007 article, the *Wall Street Journal* called Ohio State “College Sports’ Biggest Money Machine” and pointed out that “the OSU athletic department is a gold-plated island in a region getting roiled by harsh economic forces. ... OSU’s athletic budget, which has grown 46 percent in five years, has expanded despite a

prolonged downturn in the Ohio economy and several rounds of public-funding cuts to higher education. The state’s median household income fell 9.3 percent between 2000 and 2005, one of the worst declines for any state during that span.”

Hundreds of Ohio State students held a vigil in remembrance of Kosta Karageorge after the news of his death came out Sunday night. On Wednesday more than 600 family members, friends and teammates attended his funeral. He was 22 years old.



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