

Star US professional football player retires over fears of brain trauma

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San Francisco 49ers linebacker Chris Borland announced last week that he is retiring from football at age 24 due to concerns over the future impact of head injuries he would suffer were he to continue playing.

In his announcement, Borland told TV sports channel ESPN, “I just honestly want to do what’s best for my health. From what I’ve researched and what I’ve experienced, I don’t think it’s worth the risk... I feel largely the same, as sharp as I’ve ever been. For me, it’s wanting to be proactive.

“I’m concerned that if you wait till you have symptoms, it’s too late... There are a lot of unknowns. I can’t claim that X will happen. I just want to live a long healthy life, and I don’t want to have any neurological diseases or die younger than I would otherwise.”

Borland said he first started to have concerns about football’s effects on him during his rookie training camp, when he suffered what he believed to be a concussion on a running play. But because he was concerned that he would not make the team if he left the field, he continued practicing.

Borland went on to tell ESPN that his desire to stay on the field even when possibly concussed, and the history of the men before him who had done the same, stayed with him.

He said: “I just thought to myself, ‘What am I doing? Is this how I’m going to live my adult life, banging my head, especially with what I’ve learned and knew about the dangers?’”

Borland wrote a letter to his parents during the season, he said, explaining that his National Football League (NFL) career would probably be a short one. After his rookie season, he consulted with several renowned concussion experts to get a better understanding of the dangers.

“I’ve thought about what I could accomplish in football, but when you read about Mike Webster and Dave Duerson and Ray Easterling, you read all these stories, and to be the type of player I want to be in football, I think I’d have to take on some risks that as a person I don’t want to take on.”

Mike Webster was a Hall of Fame player who, after a sixteen-year career, suffered from amnesia, dementia, depression and acute bone and muscle pain. After his death in 2002 at age 50, Webster became the first player diagnosed with chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), a neurodegenerative disease.

CTE, which at this point can be diagnosed only postmortem, is a progressive neurological degenerative disease most often found in the brains of boxers and others who have a history of multiple concussions. Its symptoms include memory loss, aggression, confusion, depression, suicidal thoughts and dementia.

It has become common knowledge that many former NFL players incurred significant brain damage during their careers. Suicides have occurred at alarming rates, including Duerson and Easterling in 2012, Junior Seau that same year, Andre Waters in 2006 and Terry Long in 2005. The families of these players insisted that autopsies be performed, and all were subsequently diagnosed with CTE.

The NFL for decades denied that football played any role in debilitating head trauma or that head trauma was connected to CTE, bringing forward well-paid shills to provide a “medical” cover for its negligence and indifference.

As a result of a series of lawsuits filed by retired players, it has been proven, however, that hundreds of former players are suffering from dementia as a result of football-related head trauma, and that CTE has been repeatedly found in deceased players—34 out of 35 in

2012.

Consequently, in documents the NFL filed in federal court in September 2014, it admitted 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.

Borland is the fifth player 30 or younger to retire in the last few weeks, and the second 49ers player. Last year, former Vikings and Seahawks receiver Sidney Rice retired at age 27. Rice said that while he showed no signs of head trauma, he had experienced several concussions during his NFL career.

“You have these guys that have been going to the same house for 25 years,” he said. “And all of the sudden they get to a certain point on their way home and they have to call their wives to get the directions home. So that is something that really hit home for me after having experienced so many concussions.”

He and Giants punter Steve Weatherford have agreed to donate their brains posthumously for research.

Speaking of Borland’s announcement, Gary Plummer, an NFL linebacker for 12 seasons who is in the early stages of dementia, said, “It’s a decision that should wake up the powers-that-be. I think the retirement of a young, up-and-coming player should be a watershed moment for the NFL that something needs to be done for the safety of the game.”

By retiring after the first year of a multimillion-dollar, four-year contract, Borland is walking away from a minimum of \$2 million, and most likely many times more than that, based upon his outstanding rookie season. He also announced Sunday on the “Face the Nation” news interview program that he is returning 75 percent of his \$617,00 signing bonus attached to his contract.

“To play one year, it’s not a cash grab as I’ve been accused of. I’m paying back three-fourths of my signing bonus. I’m only taking the money I’ve earned. This to me is just about health and nothing else. I’ve never played the game for money or attention.”

To the NFL, however, football is all about money, which is obtained at the expense of its players’ health. The average worth of the league’s 32 teams is \$1.17 billion. The NFL brought in more than \$9 billion in revenue last year, and last month’s Super Bowl between the New England Patriots and Seattle

Seahawks was the most-watched program in television history. Thirty-second ad spots sold for \$4.5 million.

Its highest paid employee is not a player, but the representative of its billionaire owners, NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell, who receives an annual salary of \$44 million working within the safe confines of his Park Avenue office. Goodell recently announced that the league intends to boost revenues to \$25 billion by 2017.



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