NFL player Damar Hamlin in recovery three days after on-field collapse

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Medical staff at the University of Cincinnati Medical Center (UCMC) removed the breathing tube of professional American football player Damar Hamlin overnight on Thursday. Hamlin was breathing on his own and talking, according to tweets by his NFL team the Buffalo Bills.

The 24-year-old defensive player, "continues to progress remarkably in his recovery," the team tweeted Friday morning, adding that his "neurological function remains intact and he has been able to talk to his family and care team."

A subsequent tweet from the team reported, "Damar Hamlin FaceTimed into our team meeting today to talk to players and coaches. What he said to the team: 'Love you boys.'" Doctors also reported that Hamlin asked, "Did we win?" upon regaining consciousness and one of the doctors told him, "The answer is yes, you won the game of life."

While Hamlin has made progress, medical professionals at UCMC said it is far too early to determine if the athlete will be able to make a full recovery.

Hamlin, who was in the second season of his NFL career, collapsed suddenly following a tackle he made during the first quarter of the Monday night game between the Buffalo Bills and the Cincinnati Bengals that was being watched on live television by millions of people.

While his collision with Bengals receiver Tee Higgins appeared to be a routine football event, Hamlin went into cardiac arrest immediately after he stood up. Team medical staff rushed onto the field to provide emergency aid—including cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) administered by assistant athletic trainer Denny Kellington—to save Hamlin's life when his heart was not beating.

Although the precise cause of the heart attack is unknown, one theory is that Hamlin suffered from a phenomenon called commotio cordis, in which a blow to the chest at a precise location and in a precise moment can send a perfectly healthy individual into cardiac arrest.

One of the doctors treating the athlete, Dr. William Knight—who is also a professor in the Department of Emergency Medicine at the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine—told NBC News on Thursday that commotio cordis is "on the list of considerations," but other conditions would have to be ruled out first.

Hamlin grew up in the small working class town of McKees Rocks, Pennsylvania and attended the University of Pittsburgh, where he was a standout defensive college football player. He is beloved by his teammates and has been described by them as having an infectious personality and influence on others. A charity Hamlin created during the pandemic called "Chasing M's Foundation" has now received 200,000 contributions and raised more than $7 million since Monday.

While the NFL, a business association of 32 teams and their owners with a combined value of more than $130 billion, has been conducting a steady public relations campaign professing its "support for Damar Hamlin through week 18," the organization has been preoccupied with the disruptive impact of the player's near-death collapse on its post-season playoff schedule.

At first, the NFL intended to restart the Monday night game as soon as Hamlin was taken off the field in an ambulance. Only after the players, staff and coaches refused to return to the game did the NFL and its commissioner Roger Goodell begin feigning sympathies over the shock experienced by everyone on the field and in the audience.

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Since the outcome of the Bills-Bengals game had implications for the playoffs leading up to the Super Bowl scheduled for February 12, the NFL initially hoped to complete the remaining three quarters at a later date. As explained by *USA Today*, “while Hamlin's health is paramount, at some point decisions must be made regarding the schedule—specifically as it pertains to the uncompleted Bills-Bengals contest.”

Then, on Thursday, the NFL cancelled the game, with Goodell saying it was “difficult, but necessary” under the “extraordinary circumstances.” With tens of millions of dollars at stake for the teams in the playoffs, the NFL owners met on Friday and passed a resolution that declared the cancelled game a “no contest” and worked out a complicated series of involving who would play whom and where they would play after the final week of the regular season this weekend.

American professional football is by far the most violent and dangerous among professional team sports due to the number and severity of the injuries suffered by its players. On any given week, there are dozens of injured NFL players who are listed by the teams with either “out,” “doubtful” or “questionable” playing statuses. The NFL teams provide little official information about regular back, ankle, shoulder, knee, groin, abdomen, hamstring, foot and quadricep (to name a few) injuries to players.

It is now well-established that football players suffer from very high rates of the brain disease chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) from repeated blows to the head without adequate time for healing. The NFL spent years blocking scientific evidence that players and former platers suffer from CTE from being made public.

Earlier this year, 24 year-old Miami Dolphins quarterback Tua Tagovailoa suffered a frightening injury after being tackled in a game, also in Cincinnati, where his hands froze in front of his face and his fingers began curling backwards towards his palms. It was later revealed Tagovailoa had suffered a concussion in the game the week prior, but was allowed to return to the game, and cleared to play in the following matchup against the Bengals. Multiple concussions suffered in a short time span can be fatal.

In a game on Christmas Day, Tagovailoa suffered a third head injury against the Green Bay Packers. Incredibly, he was not ruled out of the following week’s contest for several days.

The NFL and its associated commercial sponsorships and television broadcasting empire is a microcosm of American capitalism: competitive high-speed athletic violence combined with the promotion of various forms of backwardness, militarism and national patriotic propaganda.

The feigned sympathetic response of the talking heads in the corporate media to the collapse of Damar Hamlin on national TV is belied by the well-known fact that the NFL is responsible for numerous catastrophic injuries over the decades including death on the football field.

In 1971, 28-year-old wide receiver for the Detroit Lions, Chuck Hughes, collapsed on the field at Tiger Stadium in the fourth quarter and began convulsing. He was taken from by ambulance to Henry Ford Hospital where he was pronounced dead. In front of a stunned crowd, the game was completed and the players only learned of Hughes’ death after it was over.

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