

## Community Comment

We're now in the beginning of both football season and what many call The Drinking Season. While both of these activities aren't always related, both of these topics, while enjoyable, can be damaging and potentially lethal.

Alcohol is at both ends of Brain Injury in that it's a common cause of traffic collisions, falls and violence. After a brain injury many self-medicate themselves from pain and depression with over-indulgence - causing even more depression and in some cases, suicide.

Because the brain isn't fully developed until about 25 years of age, alcohol plays a significant role in stunting brain development. Multiple concussions may also interfere and even set back brain development.

If consumed in its extreme over the age of 65, alcohol plays a significant role in deterioration of the brain. I'll spare you the medical details for now.

It's Football Season and that means that players of all ages are subject to multiple concussions per game. This is particularly dangerous because two concussions within a 10-day period can cause permanent damage. Most NFL and college football players average up to six concussions per game. Brain-oriented diseases such as Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, epilepsy, depression and death are closely associated with multiple concussions.

Injured players are often rewarded for returning to the field and are therefore likely to sustain permanent damage. Now that brain injury is more freely discussed, players from middle school to the pros are complaining of permanent loss of memory and inability to learn properly and in many cases, profound depression.

So what's the answer to the downside of so much fun?

When players show signs of concussion, they must be benched until they are medically cleared. Better to miss a game than ruin a life.

All beginning athletes should be baseline tested at the beginning of each season to determine a brain-oriented injury occurs. This is being done in Humboldt County as we speak.

Never, under any circumstances, should an injured player be encouraged to return to the field.

Don't drink to excess. Don't drink and drive.

Self-medication with alcohol may feel good in the short term but in the long run, it will likely lead to a brain injury, whether by impact or making a current brain injury more severe.

Whether you're a football fan or a player, alcohol reduces good judgement and may lead to injuries on the field, in the stands and driving home from the game.

Let's enjoy both Football Season and what many call the Drinking Season with a bit of awareness and consideration for others and our self.

I'm Jeffrey Smoller from Making Headway Center for Brain Injury Recovery where your brain is always on our mind.