Sending Your Kid to Football Camp? We urge you to reconsider. While the benefits of fresh air, exercise, and teamwork are well known by the football community, the inherent danger of brain disease is NOT. It cost us our son’s brain and ultimately his life.

By now you have probably heard of CTE or Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy, a progressive, degenerative disease that destroys the brain. Most people associate it with military veterans, pro-football players and repeated traumatic, concussive blows to the head. But that’s far from the complete picture.

What Every Parent Needs to Know…

CTE is also caused by repeated sub-concussive blows, the kind that occur routinely when athletes “head” the ball in soccer, “check” each other in hockey, and hit and tackle in football. This means someone can develop CTE without ever sustaining a concussion. That includes children, who are the most vulnerable of all. And CTE doesn’t typically develop right away. It can take years, even decades, often presenting itself long after risky activity has ceased. Its symptoms include memory loss, confusion, impaired judgment, paranoia, impulse control problems, aggression, depression, and progressive dementia. Our son died from the worst symptom, suicide at the age of 32. He started football at the age of 10.

How Concerned Should You Be?...

If your child’s football camp allows or promotes “contact” hitting and tackling in training and scrimmages, you need to be VERY concerned. In fact, don’t drop them off. There’s a good reason that the NFL and Ivy League schools have virtually removed hitting from football practice. Youth soccer has also eliminated “heading.” Youth hockey has eliminated “checking”. And the Flag Until 14 movement (promoting flag football until 14 years of age) is gaining momentum.

It is only a matter of time before youth football follows suit and eliminates contact from practice, but until they take the steps to properly protect your children, your children are relying on you. Don’t let them down.

How Real is the Risk?...

For generations, American families have cheered from the sidelines as their children took hits and got their “bells rung.” Why all the concern now? Well, the sad fact is we didn’t know then what we know now. CTE can’t be diagnosed until after death, and if athletes developed erratic behavior later in life, it was easy to blame it on something else. That’s exactly what happened to us. Now we know better.

Consider this recent study performed by a brain bank in Florida. They examined the brains of people who had played amateur contact sports. An astonishing 33%, were determined to have developed CTE. They examined an additional 200 brains from people with no history of contact sports. Zero had CTE. What’s that mean? The risk of CTE is high and very real. Yet it is also 100% preventable. Don’t let your kids play contact sports and the danger for CTE disappears. There are so many wonderful sports that do not have head impacts as a part of the game: tennis, track, golf, basketball, swimming, baseball, gymnastics, etc.

Don’t Settle for Less than the Complete Elimination of Blows to the Head…

Perhaps because of the tradition, popularity and money associated with football, there is real reluctance to radically change the sport. Instead the industry is promoting new safety gear, rule changes and distractions such as “Heads Up Football”, presented as a “comprehensive approach to safer football.” But while these things may reduce risk, as long as there is potential for blows to the head, risk is still there. It is like putting a filter on a cigarette. Don’t let anyone convince you otherwise. In fact, if they try, tell them to put it in writing that your child is safe from CTE. Your children and their brains are far too precious.