

Aaron Robinson

Bob Bednar

Journalism

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A Fork In The Road.

It was Seven O'Clock on a friday afternoon at Klein Collin High School. Justin was running down the field on kickoff. Looking left to right keeping his head on a swivel, he spots two blockers in two different direction gunning straight for him. He speeds up successfully running right pass both defenders. The ball carrier appears out of nowhere. Justin has no choice, he has to run through him with a big hit. In a matter of an instant, he lowers his shoulder as he prepares to make contact. Boom... Both players smack into each other, swapping blood and sweat as Justin's chest plate caves in and chin strap broke off. The ball flies high into the sky as the guy flies back onto his ass. Nothing but black is all that Justin sees as if he's in a sunken place. The last thing Justin remembers is the guy flying back as he sees, his life flash before his eyes. He lays there on the cold hard turf unable to move. He was paralyzed with a concussion. Justin explained having a concussion as an "out of body experience, seeing stars like in the cartoon and black spots all around of me." "When someone was talking to me, I could hear them but I'm not listening. Nothing was registering for me in my mind." After a couple of weeks later he miraculously fully recovered from all symptoms showing how

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the brain is so magnificent and powerful. It allowed him to continue to play the game he loved, moving forward to his collegiate career.

People enjoy football for the Super bowl, Tailgating, Cinderella Stories, etc. Most people have no idea how dangerous football really is. I'm here to talk about the long terms effects of the risk that football can cause to the brain. Football players are extremely likely to experience some level of brain injury. Within a football game there are and estimated 120-160 plays. During these plays there are collisions happening by 22 players, someone either getting hit tackled, speared and laid out. Naturally this is can cause a problem of serious brain trauma for young kids, young adults and adults playing the dangerous game of football. Helmet-to-helmet hits can reach between 100 and 150 on the G-force scale. A comparison to this would an F-16 fighter jet rolling in a turn. The G force is the measurement of acceleration felt as weight; force per unit mass and can measured by accelerometer. The human body can handle a tackle with a half a ton of force, and then some because it is well distributed throughout the body, unlike the head. Helmet-to helmet hits cannot be distributed evenly, the brain is surrounded by fluid and protective membranes called meninges, which usually cushion the brain. Thus, causing the brain move backwards, forward, and side to side hitting the skull causing nerve cells and their fibers to break and having a higher chance of blood vessels to be stretched

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beyond their ability, in which causes the traumatic brain injury that is known as concussion.

Concussions have always been a part of the game since the NFL started, but are increasing rapidly as players getting bigger, faster, and stronger. The awareness of concussions have raised because more and more player are developing them. New rules have been implemented to protect players so the overall amount decreases. The new regulations include how long a player has to stay out after receiving a concussion and also the penalty of fining athletes that deliberately use helmet-to-helmet contact on an opposing player. The NFL has made more specific rules that state if a player suffers a concussion, they should not be able to return to play or practice the same day. If the player shows any signs or symptoms of a concussion, the player must complete a neuropsychological test and have been cleared by both the team physician and a neurological consultant. The NCAA has similar guidelines for neurological testing to track a concussions progress by revising the guidelines on not letting athletes returning to play the same day and having mandatory check-ups.

On a sunny day on october 26, the wind was blowing .5 miles at around 2:30 in the afternoon. The crowds was going wild, Justin lines up for kickoff ready to take

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someone's head off in the biggest game of the year. A million thoughts are going through his mind as he dug his cleats into the turf of Sam Houston State University field. He looked up at the battleground as he scanned for the player he knew was going to the ball. The whistle blew. The kicker takes his steps and kicked the ball deep. Justin takes off, all he saw was bodies flying around as his teammates clash into the enemy team. He ignores it all, the only thing he could concentrate on was the man receiving the ball. He sprinted down the field ducking and dodging blockers left and right until, finally getting face to face with the ball carrier. Justin landed a hit to the guy that created a loud cracking sound, which caused him to fall on to the hot turf of Sam Houston football field. He laid for 10 minute shaken up and slow to get up, seeing stars, feeling dazed, and losing consciousness. He was in the sunken place again with and concussion. Justin wakes with the trainers and coaches all around him. His memory was shot, he had trouble remembering people's name. The coaches and trainers got him up, he couldn't walk on his own. They walked him back inside the locker room where the doctor took a look at him. Moments after, the doctor initially looked at him and went through standard concussion protocol, he was then put in an ambulance. As Justin is laying in the back of the ambulance he thinks to himself.

“How could this happen again?”

“Why does bad shit always happen to me?”

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“I'm a straight A student.”

“I'm a good dude.”

“I recycle”

“I don't drink often”

“I don't party”

“I get along with my family and most people.”

“I treat females and everyone with respect”

“Why, God why?”

Arriving at the hospital Justin was then put in a room with a enormous machine that could fit him inside of it. It was a PET and MRI machine. He sits on it and thinks back to himself.

“How can this happen to me.”

“Am i going to get my memory back?”

“Is my football career done?”

“Am I going to be able to finish school?”

“No, no, no, no, this is my 4 concussion...”

“Is this it for me?”

“Is it time to hang it up for good?”

“Why, God why?”

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Justin then lays his head back on the cold hard bed that looked like stretcher as he undergoes a machine doing PET scan and MRI screening. He closed his eyes and sits still, everything went black.

Justin played football player for 9 years. He dreamed of living a life of football because it was his passion. He put it before anything in his life, which included his own well being. Unfortunately, a concussions would be the thing to end his football career. Justin started playing football back in the 5th grade with the Schindewolf Timberwolves. During this time and age of his life he was a very lengthy kid who towered over kids his age. Justin remembers always being the being the biggest kid on the field all the way up until high school.

The smell of grass and mud filled the air of the middle school field in Klein, Texas. It was game day for a young Justin Gil. Justin was the star running back of the Schindewolf Timberwolves hoping to lead them to a district championship. It was the 4th quarter of the district championship. Justin's team was down a touchdown, no panic though. Schindewolf Timberwolves has the ball the ball on there on 47 yard line with plenty of time left on the clock to make score. The stadium is filled with students and parents cheering their friends and loved ones on, if you were there you would think that

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you were at super bowl 51. The clock ticked down 44, 43, 42, the Timberwolves needed to score here. The quarterback says hut, hut, hike and hands the ball off. Justin has the ball in hands now, he sees a gap in the offensive line and hits it hard. He's now in the second wave of the defense and sees nothing but 2 little chunky linebackers in front of him. He lowers his head and braces for the hit. BOOM! He runs both of them over with ease and takes off. Moving along to the last line of defense there are two safeties ready to take him down. Justin lowers his shoulder again as he braces for impact again. One safety trips and falls in the mud taking him out of the play, the other jumped on his back. Unfazed by the little guy on his back justin carries him about 10 yards until he finally falls off. After seeing nothing but green in front of him Justin then relaxes his body and takes off into a dash for the endzone. He ran as if he was in a cartoon with a dog chasing after him as if he had a T-bone steak. Nobody would catch him after that, winning the district championship for his team. He then realized that he loved football and made the lifelong dream of playing in the NFL, he couldn't see himself doing anything besides that.

Getting a concussion in a contact sport can change the path of someones life. A concussions can change the way a person thinks or acts and even lose the identity of who they are. Thus Creating a feeling of spiraling someone who had once a great life

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into a path of darkness and unknown. Concussions can have the repercussions on mental health, intellect and physical functioning. Multiple head injuries increase the risks of later problems.

Opening his eye, after being pulled from the machine. The doctor came up to him saying

Doctor: "Son I have some bad new for you, You will no longer get to play the game of football anymore."

Justin: replies with "really?"

Doctor: "yes, i'm sorry but you have suffered your 4th concussion and it will not be wise to play anymore. You will receive more damage to your brain and body. That will not be good for your health."

Justin: "I understand.... But hey Doc, I still can't remember anything about the play that happen to me that has me here. Actually i don't remember really much about earlier events in my life."

Justin then thinks to himself what do I do now. I can't play football anymore. He then broke down and cried.

Doctor: "I see... well we will give you medication and you check on you regularly and hopefully it should improve."

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Justin was diagnosed with a post traumatic amnesia and put on 8 different medications. Justin's in disbelief. His whole life has changed in the blink of an eye.

Months have flown by since the accident. He's being medically released from the team but still is on scholarship. He has seen the play that changed the course of his life. This has been the most difficult time in his life by far. He needs special study habits to even be able to do his course work. He couldn't remember any new material and to learn it he had to repeat things over and over to himself 100 times just to remember it. He had to do this for all 6 of his classes, it was a real pain. The teachers tried to help in the best way they could by giving him class notes and had open note tests. But it wasn't good enough a straight A student was spiraling down a dark path. Justin even had to change his daily routine. He loved playing video games in his free time but due to the severity of his injury he was unable to play video games for 5 months because he had to stop all stimulus that might activate it because it could cause more internal damage that cannot be fixed.

Justin's life today, after overcoming his injury, has found a new passion and drive for life. He's a completely new person than he was before. Now he is pursuing business and wants to be a coach one day. Justin lives now by inspiring people to be better and

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motives them to achieve all they can by always doing their best in whatever they put their mind to. Justin tells me that “He does miss football but he wouldn’t change the life that he has now, he has gotten a dog named Maximus who he loves dearly. He say “Without that accident this would of never happen and he wouldn't have been so open minded to getting out of his element and trying new things.” He loves the person he is today.

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Authors Note

I decided to write about concussions as my bigger picture interview because I had a few myself and I could relate. Football is a big part of my life and I'm not sure how I would feel if I was forced to let it go. After talking to Justin about his concussion, I realize every play I play could be my last and that I must live my dream to the fullest. I also wrote this to educate people on the dangers of playing football and how it could harm your body in the long run. I had difficulties getting this paper started. I had to read lots of articles to look up the new rules and regulations and fit it all in. Currently I am stuck on how to transition from the awareness part back to the story outline. It gets really confusing for me.

After figuring out how I wanted outline everything the rest came natural. I got closer to Justin bring allowing us to have text everyday since the interview started. We relate on so much. This paper has not only brought me closer to someone but it has also allowed me to try to be more open minded. It showed me football is a gift that I shouldn't take it for granted. I should always try to find the bright side of a situation like Justin if anything was to happen. Since the interview I've looked into more careers and what I should do with my life for when the day I'm done being a football player. It's really scary to think of that day but it could happen at anytime and I need to have a fall back plan if it ever does. I'm glad I took this summer class, I made new friends, and gain

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closeness with other my other friend that I didn't have before cause I barely knew him. I just knew he had a life changing injury. I believe I honestly found a new sense of self from this class.

Taking this journalism class has helped me find my sense of self. I've learned from the first article that it's okay to open up. Writing the first article I had to really dig deep and interview myself. I found out things I really didn't notice about myself.

Writing the second article about one of our class made me get out of my comfort zone with landon asking me question about me. I'm really not the type of person to open up to many people, especially if I barely even know them. That taught me to be more open and understand maybe opening up is a good thing. Landon made it especially comfortable to open up to him. This is because he opened up to me write away answering any question that I would ask.

The final article aloud me to go out and explore and ask someone who I didn't know very well and wasn't in the class to open and tell about their life and experiences. This was very challenging because I need to gain Justin trust before he would actually open up to me about his personal life. I had to start off with basic questions, that lead up to more challenging question to get the story I needed.

Taking this class was challenging because it got me out of my element but it was

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also fun and I learned a lot from it. Again I'm glad I took this because it help me grow as a person.

Thank you Bob Bednar.