

[NASSH 2023 Pre-Conference Workshop: Remembering the Injured Brain in Sport History](#)

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Call for Papers

Remembering the Injured Brain in Sport History

Hyatt Regency Crystal City, Washington DC

Thursday May 25, 2023

Rationale

The concussion crisis in sport appears to be less than two decades old, initiated in 2005 by the highly publicized discovery of CTE in the brain of former NFL footballer Mike Webster (Omalu, 2005). Sporting organizations, particularly those who oversee contact and collision sports, have scrambled to address the implications of the crisis, as medical and media reports of irreparably brain damaged players threaten to scare away players, viewers, and sponsors. Throughout the crisis, these organizations have claimed that they been confronted by new and unforeseeable problems, created by recent scientific revelations about the dangers of repeated head trauma. Yet, concussion has been an ever-present element of sporting participation around the globe, and recent historical research has begun to reveal at least 100 years of medical concerns about its lasting neurological consequences (Townsend, 2021; Casper, 2018). This raises the question: to what extent can sporting organizations claim ignorance about the long-term consequences of concussion prior to 2005? Sport historians have a key role to play in answering this question. By interrogating medical and legal documents, media reporting, and participant accounts, sport historians can begin to build a clearer and fuller picture of brain injury knowledge in sport prior to 2005. This symposium brings together historians of sport, medicine, health, law, and the media to provide much needed rigor to current debates about who should assume historical and contemporary responsibility for protecting athlete brains.

Objectives

- Generate historical knowledge about brain injuries as a genuinely transnational issue that extends beyond specific sports and national sporting cultures
- Strengthen research about the history of brain injuries in sport prior to 2005 that is largely underrepresented in the body of knowledge about this critical issue
- Build connections between sport historians and historians of health, science and medicine who share a collective interest in sport-related brain injuries
- Contribute to public conversations about duty of care in sport that have a long historical trajectory from early boxing and football to contemporary body contact sports
- Produce a body of knowledge, focused on sport-related brain injuries, that will constitute a special issue of the *Journal of Sport History*

Venue

The venue is the **Hyatt Regency Crystal City, Washington DC**. This workshop will be held just prior (May 25) to the annual meeting of the North American Society for Sport History (NASSH) at the **Hyatt Regency Crystal City** (May 26-29). Participants are encouraged to attend both events and to also present their scholarship at NASSH. See www.nassh.org for more details or contact one of the organizers (below) with any questions.

Format: Online and Face-to Face

The pre-Conference Workshop will be both an online (via HOPIN) and a face-to-face workshop held on Thursday May 25. While online contributions are welcomed, face-to-face attendees will receive contributions toward accommodation as well as venue catering.

Requirements

If interested please submit a 300-500 word abstract and a 200-word biography to Dr Stephen Townsend s.townsend@uq.edu.au by January 30, 2023. Those selected will be notified by mid-February 2023 and required to provide a draft paper by April 15, 2023. Selected participants will present a 10-15 minute version of their longer paper at the workshop, which will also be read and commented upon by other participants.

Outcomes

Successful papers will be eligible to appear in a special issue of the *Journal of Sport History*.

Organizing committee

- Dr Stephen Townsend (The University of Queensland, Australia) s.townsend@uq.edu.au
- Professor Murray Phillips (The University of Queensland, Australia) m.phillips@uq.edu.au
- Associate Professor Gary Osmond (The University of Queensland, Australia) g.osmond@uq.edu.au
- Dr Rebecca Olive (RMIT University, Australia) rebecca.olive@rmit.edu.au

References

Bachynski, Kathleen, *No Game for Boys to Play: The History of Youth Football and the Origins of a Public Health Crisis*, UNC Press Books, 2019.

Casper, Stephen T., "Concussion: A History of Science and Medicine, 1870-2005," *Headache* 58.6 (2018): 795-810. <https://doi.org/10.1111/head.13288>

Harrison, Emily A., "The First Concussion Crisis: Head Injury and Evidence in Early American Football." *American Journal of Public Health* 104.5 (2014): 822-834. doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2013.301840.

Omalu, Bennet I. et al, "Chronic traumatic encephalopathy in a National Football League player," *Neurosurgery* 57.1 (2005): 128-34. doi: [10.1227/01.neu.0000163407.92769.ed](https://doi.org/10.1227/01.neu.0000163407.92769.ed)

Townsend, Stephen, "'The Tragedy of the Punch Drunk': Reading Concussion in Australian Sporting Newspapers, 1843-1954," *Frontiers in Sport and Active Living* 3.1 (2021) doi: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fspor.2021.676463>