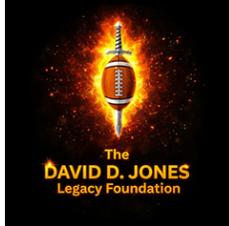


BEFORE THE NEXT HIT

A CTE Awareness Guide for Parents, Coaches & Athletes

Free Download for Families, Coaches and Student-Athletes



**By: The David D. Jones
Legacy Foundation**

**HONORING THE GAME.
HEALING THE IMPACT.**

How to Use This Guide

This guide was created to help families, coaches and athletes better understand brain health in sports.

You can read it from beginning to end or use the sections most relevant to you:

Parents

Learn what warning signs to watch for and how to advocate for athlete safety.

Athletes

Understand how protecting your brain today supports your future beyond the game.

Coaches & Athletic Leaders

Build a culture where performance and protection go hand in hand.

Community & Faith Leaders

Use this guide to help start conversations about long-term athlete wellness.

Our goal is not to discourage sports participation.

Sports build discipline, teamwork, leadership and opportunity.

This guide exists to help ensure athletes can enjoy those benefits while protecting long-term brain health.

A Letter from the Founder

Football gave my brother opportunity, discipline and lifelong brotherhood. He went on to play at the college and professional levels, achieving goals he worked toward for years.

After his playing days ended, subtle changes began to surface over time. At first, they were easy to overlook. Gradual shifts in mood. Memory lapses. Challenges that didn't seem connected to the game he once loved.

Like many families, we did not yet understand how repetitive head impacts could affect the brain years later.

This guide exists because families deserve that information sooner.

It exists for the parent sitting in the stands.
For the athlete chasing a scholarship.
For the coach shaping young leaders.

As a person of faith, I believe stewardship extends beyond the field. It includes protecting the mind, the future and the well-being of those entrusted to our care.

You can honor the game and still ask better questions.
You can compete at a high level and still prioritize long-term brain health.

Our mission at **The David D. Jones Legacy Foundation** is not to discourage sports. It is to strengthen the future of athletes by equipping families with education, awareness and practical steps that protect what matters most.

The next generation deserves informed decisions — not delayed conversations.

With respect,

Cynthia A. Jones
Founder
The David D. Jones Legacy Foundation

Research Snapshot

What Current Studies Are Showing

Research over the past two decades has increased understanding of how repeated head impacts may affect long-term brain health in athletes.

Research conducted by **The Boston University CTE Center** has revealed concerning patterns among former football players, whose brains were donated for scientific study.

In one widely cited study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA), signs of Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE) were found in:

1. **110 of 111** former NFL players studied
2. **48 of 53** former college football players studied
3. **3 of 14** former high school players studied

These findings highlight a strong association between repetitive head impacts and long-term brain disease among the athletes examined.

Important Context

These cases were part of brain donation studies, meaning many families chose to donate because symptoms were present. These results do not represent all former athletes but highlight the importance of continued research, awareness and prevention.

Source: McKee AC et al., *JAMA*, 2017.

Understanding Brain Trauma

Brain injuries in sports are not limited to diagnosed concussions.

Researchers now understand that repetitive head impacts, even those that do not cause immediate concussion symptoms, may accumulate over time and affect long-term brain health.

Athletes in contact sports may experience hundreds or even thousands of head impacts over the course of a career.

These repeated impacts can sometimes contribute to neurological changes years later.

Understanding this risk allows families, coaches, and athletes to make more informed decisions while continuing to enjoy the benefits of sports participation.

Awareness is not about fear.
It is about preparation and protection.

When Symptoms Don't Appear All at Once

Changes in brain health often develop gradually. In many cases, symptoms may appear years after an athlete's playing career ends.

A progression reported by many families of former athletes may look something like this:

Elite-Level Play

Years of competitive athletics with no obvious long-term symptoms.

Early Post-Career Changes

Depression, emotional withdrawal, subtle mood shifts.

Gradual Cognitive Decline

Memory lapses, irritability, difficulty maintaining employment.

Escalating Struggles

Increased memory loss, personality changes, substance dependence.

Advanced Neurological Symptoms

Parkinsonism, severe cognitive impairment, difficulty eating, seizures.

While CTE can only be definitively diagnosed after death, many families have reported similar patterns of progressive neurological decline.

Support & Next Steps

If you recognize these changes in someone you love, you are not alone.

Consider:

- *Seeking medical evaluation from a licensed physician*
- *Consulting with a neurologist if symptoms involve memory or motor function*
- *Contacting a mental health professional if depression or emotional changes are present*
- *Addressing substance use concerns with qualified treatment providers*

If someone is in crisis, **Dial 988** – the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline or seek immediate medical help.

Warning Signs Families Should Not Ignore

Changes in brain health can appear gradually and may sometimes be mistaken for stress or aging.

Recognizing patterns early can make a meaningful difference.

Emotional Changes

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Increased irritability
- Emotional withdrawal

Cognitive Changes

- Memory loss
- Difficulty concentrating
- Confusion
- Slower thinking

Behavioral Changes

- Impulsivity
- Personality changes
- Difficulty maintaining employment
- Increased reliance on alcohol or substances

Physical Changes

- Balance problems
- Tremors
- Speech difficulties
- Seizures in advanced stages

If symptoms persist, consult a licensed medical professional.

What Parents Can Do Now

Parents play an important role in shaping a culture where athlete safety matters as much as competition.

Practical steps include:

Ask About Safety Protocols

Understand concussion policies and return-to-play procedures.

Encourage Honest Reporting

Athletes should feel safe reporting symptoms.

Monitor Recovery Carefully

Proper healing time after injuries is essential.

Pay Attention to Changes

Do not dismiss mood or cognitive changes.

Choose Programs That Value Health

Look for coaches who emphasize proper technique and safety.

Keep a Long-Term Perspective

A season lasts months. Brain health lasts a lifetime.

To the Athlete

You can love the game. You can protect your brain.

You train to be stronger.

You push through pain.

You compete because that's who you are.

The game teaches discipline, brotherhood, sacrifice and resilience — but so does protecting your future.

Brain health is not weakness.

Reporting symptoms is not quitting.

Recovery is not falling behind.

It is leadership.

A sports career may last years.

Your life will last decades.

This message is personal to me. I've seen how subtle changes over time can reshape a life after the game ends — and the next generation deserves that conversation sooner.

The next play matters but so does the next 40 years.

A Message to Coaches & Athletic Leaders

Coaches shape more than athletes. You shape culture.

Athletes look to you for leadership both on and off the field.

As awareness grows around brain health, coaches have an opportunity to lead a culture where performance and protection go hand in hand.

Strong leadership includes:

- Teaching proper technique
- Encouraging honest symptom reporting
- Supporting recovery after injury
- Prioritizing long-term athlete health

Strong programs develop strong players.

Great programs protect them.

Starting the Conversation About Brain Health in Sports

Sports build discipline, teamwork, leadership and resilience.

Those benefits are part of what makes athletics so powerful in the lives of young people.

At the same time, families, coaches and athletes must also understand the importance of protecting long-term brain health.

Conversations about safety should not take away from the love of the game — they should strengthen it.

Questions Families and Teams Can Discuss

For Athletes

- Do you understand the symptoms of a concussion?
- Would you feel comfortable reporting symptoms to a coach or trainer?
- Are you thinking about your long-term health as well as your performance?

For Parents

- Do you know the signs of concussion and post-concussion symptoms?
- Does your child's program emphasize both performance and safety?
- Are you comfortable asking questions about athlete health?

For Coaches

- Are athletes encouraged to report symptoms without fear of losing playing time?
- Do athletes understand that protecting their brain protects their future?

The Goal

- The goal is not to discourage participation in sports.
- The goal is to ensure that athletes can enjoy the benefits of the game **while protecting the life that follows it.**

Athletes deserve the opportunity to pursue their dreams — and the knowledge to protect their future.

About the David D. Jones Legacy Foundation

The David D. Jones Legacy Foundation was created to honor the life of David D. Jones and to help protect the next generation of athletes through education, awareness and community engagement.

Through partnerships with schools, churches and athletic programs, the foundation provides speaking engagements, educational resources and community outreach designed to promote long-term brain health.

Expanding Protection for Underserved Athletes

The foundation is also working to provide modern concussion-reducing protective equipment to student-athletes in underserved communities.

Through donor support, we aim to supply helmets, mouthguards and other safety equipment to programs that may not otherwise have access to these life-saving tools.

Partner With Us

We welcome opportunities to work with:

- Schools and universities
- Youth athletic programs
- Churches and community organizations
- Families seeking education

Athletes deserve the opportunity to pursue their dreams — but they also deserve the knowledge to protect their future.

Visit:

<https://www.cee-jayministries.org/david-d-jones-legacy-foundation>

David D. Jones Legacy Foundation
Honoring the Game. Healing the Impact.

Help Share This Message

If this guide helped you better understand brain health in sports, please consider sharing it with others.

Conversations about athlete safety can help protect the next generation of players.

You are welcome to share this guide with:

- Parents and families of student-athletes
- Coaches and athletic leaders
- Youth sports programs
- Schools and universities
- Churches and community organizations

Education and awareness can make a difference.

Together we can help ensure athletes have both the opportunity to pursue their dreams and the knowledge to protect their future.

David D. Jones Legacy Foundation

Honoring the Game. Healing the Impact.

Website:

www.cee-jayministries.org/david-d-jones-legacy-foundation

Invite us to speak at your school, team or community organization.

