

Questions Linger About Long-Term Impact of Hits to the Head

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During a recent debate addressing whether the United States should ban college football, an argument against the sport was summed up this way: Schools should not be in the business of encouraging young men to hit themselves over the head.

The reasoning behind that argument (by New Yorker magazine staff writer Malcolm Gladwell): Concussions are not what afflicts football, rather it is the cumulative effects of punishing, comparatively subtle, subconcussive hits.

"There isn't a helmet in the world that can be designed to take the sting out of those hits," said Gladwell, at the Intelligence Squared Debate hosted by Slate Magazine in New York last week. "What's the effect of all that neurological trauma? We know it's a condition called CTE."

CTE, or chronic traumatic encephalopathy, is a degenerative brain disease found among contact sport athletes - and associated with repeated head trauma - that can lead to dramatic cognitive, memory and mood problems. What scares some people about CTE is that it resembles dementia, except that it can strike people in their prime. - CNN