



Addressing Concussion Prevention in Our Youth Sports Programs

It was my honor and privilege to co-host the Youth Sports Safety Summit at the Government Center on Saturday April 21st. Keeping our kids safe in youth sports is a subject that is very close to my heart as both a coach and a father. That's why I ask that if you have a son, daughter, friend or loved one playing, coaching, or administering youth sports programs that you ask them to view the link below. It will take you to an excellent presentation on concussions and sports related injuries given at the summit by former Harvard football player, WWE wrestler, and co-founder of the Sports Legacy Institute Chris Nowinski. [Please follow this link](#) and click "Fairfax County Youth Sports Safety Summit with Supervisor Pat Herry".

The issue of sports concussion is very near and dear to me - my son Sean is an ice hockey and rugby player and is currently recovering from his second serious concussion.

He was fortunate in that even though he was playing a club sport he had coaches that were well trained in identifying and properly handling concussions. However I still remember the scared feeling as I was driving him to Fair Oaks Hospital on a Friday night as he asked me the same 5 question in the same order over 20 times regardless of how I answered him. While he was never unconscious he has no recollection of the game, being at Fair Oaks hospital, the ambulance ride to Fairfax Hospital. He finally "woke up" at 4:30 Saturday morning at Fairfax Hospital.

Then began the hard part - where do we turn for treatment, do we let him play again, if so - when, and the millions of other questions a parent asks themselves. Because he was not playing a varsity Fairfax County Public School sport - there was no baseline test to help gauge his recovery.

It was through that experience, as well as knowing others in the sporting community that have gone through similar experiences, including concussion induced suicide, that spurred me to try and help raise awareness about concussions and sports related injuries.

In April of 2011, I held a town hall meeting with along with Burke Athletic Club to address the issue of concussions in youth sports to raise awareness and to get feedback from those involved in the field as well as in youth sports about how we may tackle this problem. At the meeting we had Jon Almquist the Athletic Training Program Administrator for FCPS, and Bill Curran the Student Activities and Programs Director, explain the great work that their program does in our high schools - and what they do is outstanding. You will have a chance to hear from Jon present at another summit later this year and I highly recommend it.

The challenge for me was how to get this kind of program and its benefits into our club and youth sports where many of these concussions are happening and at a young age. Since this town hall, I have met with Jon and Bill, several sports clubs, and INOVA to investigate the possibility of providing services similar to the great services provided by our school system to our sports clubs. The challenge many of us are still working on is how to get this done in a cost effective way that does not burden the clubs or put barriers in front of those wanting to coach or play. At some point I would like to see every parent and coach receive concussion recognition, prevention and management training as well as every player receive baseline testing before they play. We still have a long way to go but the summit was an important step.

I want to recognize and thank the summit planning committee members for pulling the event together - Paul Jansen - Fairfax County's athletic coordinator, Linda Watkins - injury prevention coordinator from INOVA, John Reynolds - Marshall High School's athletic trainer, and Shane Caswell - GMU's athletic training specialist. I would also like to thank Safe Kids who made us their grant recipient. I also would like to recognize and thank INOVA for their efforts to educate general practitioners and ER professionals on concussion treatment protocols.

Thank you so very much for your interest in youth sports safety - it is important. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any thoughts or suggestions. I hope you find the video as educational as I did.