



Oakland Tribune

501

Volume 136, No. 310

An edition of the **San Jose Mercury News**

75 cents plus tax

BAY AREA NEWS GROUP - SERVING READERS WEEKLY IN PRINT AND ONLINE

Lawmakers should pass concussion bill

OUR OPINION

THE NUMBERS should give pause to any parent, but particularly those with kids playing organized sports, especially football.

Each year in the United States there are an estimated 1.6 million to 3.8 million sports-related traumatic brain injuries. Roughly 200,000 of those people end up in emergency rooms. Children age 5 to 18 account for about 65 percent of the cases. According to the Centers for Disease Control, traumatic brain injuries, mostly concussions, can cause short- or long-term changes to memory, reasoning, sensation, language or emotions. They can lead to epilepsy and increase the risk for Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease and other brain disorders.

Repeated mild traumatic brain injuries occurring over months or years can result in cumulative neurological and cognitive deficits. Repeated injuries over hours, days or weeks can be fatal.

It's for that reason that we must change the sports culture. For years, we've watched players in the National Football League get "knocked silly" or have their "bell rung" only to re-enter the same game. It's that role model that has led to a similar culture in youth sports.

Finally, in recent years, the NFL has started taking steps to restrict when a head-injured player can return to a game. With our kids, we must go much further.

Toward that end, Assemblywoman Mary Hayashi, D-Castro Valley, proposes a modest and reasonable law to help protect California's children. Assembly Bill 25 would require that already-mandated training for high school coaches include education on head injuries.

It would also prohibit public schools from allowing young athletes who suffer head injuries to return to the playing field without clearance from a doctor and parent. And it would impose those same rules on youth-sports groups that rent fields from local public schools.

Hayashi proposed more wide-ranging laws in the past that raised concerns about cost. There should be minimal cost, if any, for this scaled-down version. The Legislature should pass her bill — for the sake of our kids and for the sake of their brains.