

NFL Doctor's Role in Concussion Lawsuit May Prompt More to Join Litigation

by Anthony Caruso on August 21, 2013

NFL doctor, Elliot Pellman, has served players for several years and made critical decisions about whether to play athletes who have sustained head injuries. As new details unfold into the involvement of Pellman in these decisions - and his association with former commissioner Paul Tagliabue - legal analysts are wondering whether these details will have an impact on the ongoing concussion lawsuit and the recent addition of more players in the controversial litigation.

Newly released documents reveal that Pellman sought many times to label concussions as minor sports injuries and was involved in several studies designed to discredit independent studies proving otherwise, ESPN's Outside the Lines reports. In addition, players contend that Pellman frequently sent players back on to the field following head injuries. Perhaps more telling, documents reveal Pellman to have also been the personal physician of Paul Tagliabue for roughly 10 years prior to joining the NFL and was given unyielding authority despite his lack of expertise in brain injuries.

While many sports lawyers and professionals agree that no legal improprieties may be present, the implications of Pellman's relationship with Tagliabue and his presumed guilt at minimizing the severity of head injuries may have a profound effect on the outcome of the concussion lawsuit. The previously unpublished documents suggest that the NFL consciously paid little attention to the potential severity of head injuries and did little to gather more outside research into the subject.

Recently, the NFL and players suing the league were required to attend mediation in a last-ditch effort to come to an agreement. However, these details are likely to give players more fuel and legal basis to further their claims that the NFL failed to protect and educate athletes about the long-term effects of concussions. In light of the addition of three more former NFL players being added to the lawsuit, the details about Pellman may also prompt more players to join suit and raise potential rewards that may be extended to players.

With new league rules in place to protect players from head injuries, there could be far few reported concussions during the upcoming season. But even though these changes are intended to keep players safe, many still oppose them. By disallowing players to hit high, some argue tackles to the lower body could yield more season-ending injuries, as was recently seen with Miami Dolphins tight end Dustin Keller during a preseason game against the Houston Texans.