

by Jeremy Johnston

In May of 2009, Governor Gregoire signed the nation's toughest "youth athlete return to play" law. The law, known as the Lystedt Law, is named after a young athlete that was permitted to return to the football field after a suspected concussion. Lystedt, just thirteen at the time, suffered another blow to the head which resulted in severe brain swelling, known as second impact syndrome. It left him with catastrophic brain damage and nearly cost him his life.

According to the law, a youth athlete suspected of receiving a concussion is required to get medical clearance before returning to play. The law is the first of its kind and since its passage other states have started to follow Washington's lead.

As an assistant football coach at Bellarmine Preparatory school, I've witnessed firsthand the impact of the Lystedt Law. All youth sports organizations and schools are required to inform coaches, athletes, and parents of the risks of concussion. As a coach, I have been trained to recognize symptoms of a concussion and I am required to remove any athlete from play that is experiencing the warning signs.

While Washington has been a pioneer in passing legislation to improve safety in youth athletics, an emphasis in preventing head injuries in football has been active for several years. All levels of football have made new rules preventing helmet to helmet contact using the top or crown of the helmet. Helmets are actually being manufactured that can detect the degree of force of any given impact, which can help provide objective data as to whether an injury or potential injury has occurred. There is rumor of a mouthpiece that can detect the same forces at a much cheaper price.

These changes and improvements are made through awareness and education. MBC is a proud sponsor of the [Brain Injury Association of Washington](#). The Association's mission is to increase public awareness, support, and hope for those affected by brain injury through education, assistance, and advocacy. This Saturday night the lawyers at MBC will attend the association's 4<sup>th</sup> annual dinner and auction with honorary chairman Roger Goodell, NFL Commissioner. We at MBC are proud of the support we provide the Brain Injury Association of Washington and the activities of the association that benefit MBC's clients and my athletes.

Injury free athletics will probably never be a reality. The possibility of a concussion will always exist as long as the game of football exists. However, knowledge and better understanding of the mechanism of brain injury, as well as improved athletic gear, will reduce these risks and permit competition without the fear of disabling injury.