Do you wear a seat belt while riding in a car? Do you hold a child’s hand when crossing the street? Of course! Most people do. These things help keep people safe. So why do we allow young people to play football when evidence clearly shows how dangerous it is? Athletics are important for high school students. Participating in sports helps students become active and fit. Sports also teach important life skills like self-discipline and teamwork (Boot). However, the risks from participating in football are much greater than the benefits. Today, I will prove that football is too dangerous for kids and should be banned for students.

One reason to ban students from playing football is the danger of brain injuries called concussions. More than 60,000 concussions a year happen on high school football fields (Breslow). When compared with 12 other high school sports played by men and women, football had the most head injuries with 11.2 concussions per 10,000 games and practices (Breslow). Athletes who have had one concussion have more risk of another one (“Sports Concussion”). The long-term effects of many concussions can be enormous. Students with concussions often have trouble with memory and concentration, making learning difficult. Recent studies of the brains of former NFL players who had head injuries show abnormalities (Dotinga). Athletes are more likely to suffer from Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s disease, permanent brain damage, and other problems including memory loss and depression (Daugherty). Head injuries also put players at risk of death. Although it does not happen often, the leading cause of death from sports is head injuries. We should not expose young people to this danger (“Sports Injuries Statistics”). It is not worth playing a game that can destroy kids’ health today and later in their lives.

Why target football when other sports are also dangerous? Clearly, football is more dangerous because violent contact is part of the game. In most other sports, injuries are usually accidental. In football, hard contact and tackling are expected (Strauss). Therefore, it makes sense that serious injuries are more likely in football than other sports. In fact, football ranks number one for catastrophic injuries, which are injuries to the spine, spinal cord, skull, or brain. It is interesting to note that cheerleading was in second place (Walker). How can we allow students to play a sport that is proven to be so dangerous?

To make matters worse, there is evidence that football may actually be more dangerous than statistics show. This is because some students are failing to report their injuries. In a 2012 survey of high school football players, “a majority indicated that it was ‘okay’ to play with a concussion and said that they would ‘play through any injury to win a game,’ despite being knowledgeable about the symptoms and dangers of concussions” (Graham). An NIH study suggests several reasons that students fail to report concussions. Because concussions can be hard to diagnose, some players might not know they have a concussion. Many athletes don’t want to let the team down or lose their position on the field. Another reason is that players want to prove how “tough” they are. Some players might not know about the dangers of playing with a concussion (“Young Athletes’ Concussions Often Unreported”). When athletes don’t report concussions, statistics make football appear safer than it really is.

There are some people who argue that instead of eliminating high school football entirely, we should instead make it safer with better equipment. This is not yet possible. Recent studies have shown that while football helmets can prevent some serious injuries, such as skull fractures, they do not prevent concussions. Right now, no one knows how to make a helmet that protects from concussions (Shanman). Until there are helmets that can
Appendix 6.8 Sample Speeches #1 and #2 (continued)

Successfully protect players from the effects of concussions, we should not put young people at risk.

John Moffitt, a former NFL player, recently quit football after years of devastating injuries. He argues that the money and fame that come with being a successful football player are just not worth the risks (Belson). How many more players will have to suffer serious injuries before we stop and say “enough is enough”? Recently, many states have begun to recognize the risks of football and have slowly introduced measures to try to make the sport safer for students. But it’s not enough. Even President Obama recently stated that he would think twice before letting his son play football (if he had a son). Before deciding to play football, think long and hard about the risks. Write letters to your school and town athletic departments demanding that they ban football or at least require that players use the safest equipment and feel safe reporting their injuries. Don’t put our young people at risk! Get kids off the gridiron!

Works Cited


Appendix 6.8 Sample Speeches #1 and #2 (continued)

Sample Speech #2: Football Forever!

Statistics show that in 2012–2013 the most popular high school sport in America was football. More than 1,000,000 students participated on teams, almost twice the number of any other sport (“Most Popular High School Sports”). Even more amazing, recent data shows that 166,000,000 fans attended high school football games (“Attendance at High School Sporting Events Tops 500 Million”)! Recently, there has been debate over whether football is too dangerous for students to play. Yet all of these people support the game anyway. Are all of the players and fans being foolish? Should football be banned? No! While there are some dangers to students playing football, the benefits outweigh the risks.

Football benefits the players and the fans in many ways. According to U.S. News & World Report, students who play a sport have higher grades. They are less likely to drop out of school and more likely to go to college. They are also less likely to be obese. A study of top executives revealed that 95 percent of them played high school sports, where they learned useful career skills like leadership and teamwork (AOSSM). Football paves the way for many students to get into college to play. For a lucky few, there will be an opportunity for a high-paying career in the NFL. Football motivates students to succeed in school, avoid illegal drugs and cigarettes, and develop a strong sense of self-discipline, confidence, and leadership (Boot; Koebler).

Football also benefits the community. Ticket sales help schools raise money, and the community gets to enjoy the games and show school spirit. Clearly, there are many great reasons to play football, and I didn’t even mention how much fun it is, too!

Lots of people think football is very dangerous, but it turns out that football has an unfair reputation when compared with other sports and activities. In fact, football is not much more dangerous than many other sports for young athletes. Bicycling, basketball, cheerleading, mountain climbing, ATV riding, and skiing are also sports in which athletes are injured frequently (Schoenberger). According to a study by the University of North Carolina Center for Catastrophic Sport Injury Research, between 2002 and 2012, there were about three deaths per year because of football. The study showed there were more deaths from weight lifting, mountain climbing, and being struck by lightning than football! Hundreds die from bicycling and thousands from swimming, but no one is trying to ban those activities. In 2009, there were 35,000 deaths from automobile accidents, so driving to football practice is much more dangerous than being on the field (Boot). Why is football a target when so many other activities are just as dangerous or more so? It obviously shouldn’t be, unless people plan to ban these other common activities.

Instead of banning football, it should be made safer. There are several ways to do this. An NPR report provides a list of suggestions for how to make football safer for high school players. High school football teams should adopt each of these suggestions, and safety should be made a top priority. One suggestion is to practice in a safer way. Most concussions in football are caused when players slam into each other. Texas has recently limited the amount of helmet-to-helmet contact permitted during practice. Other states should do this, too. Also, school football teams should limit the amount of time players are allowed to practice tackling drills. Referees and coaches should ensure that players are not tackling in dangerous ways. Next, high school football teams should make sure to have access to an athletic trainer with medical training. Trainers can treat and monitor injuries such as concussions to be sure they don’t get worse. Another suggestion is to require high school players to take a medical test at the
beginning of the season to be sure they are healthy enough to
play. Finally, high school football players should be prevented
from playing at any sign of a concussion until it is clear they have
completely recovered (Calkins). Taking these measures would
make the game safer for everyone on the field.

Football is one of the greatest sports in America. Players,
coaches, and fans enjoy the combination of action, teamwork,
and strategy every day. Some benefits of this incredible sport
affect the entire community and may even last a lifetime. Sure,
it’s a little dangerous, but what true sport isn’t? More safety rules
would be a good thing, but eliminating a sport, the most popu-
lar sport, from our schools is not necessary. Let your schools,
coaches, and communities know why football matters to all of
us! Football is here to stay, and it should be!

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