BRAIN RESEARCH FOUNDATION

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PRESS RELEASE

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

Deborah Schneider
312.280.8702

Jim Prendergast
312.280.8706

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BRAIN RESEARCH FOUNDATION SAYS MORE RESEARCH IS NEEDED RELATING TO THE RISKS OF YOUNG ATHLETES SUSTAINING BRAIN INJURIES IN SPORTS

Expert panel identifies key areas for improvement; citing the need for education of athletes, parents and coaches about the symptoms of concussions

CHICAGO IL — (November 15, 2010) Heightened media focus on concussive sports injuries has brought scrutiny to the policies employed by sports organizations and associations, including schools and universities, and has revealed the major knowledge gaps about the long term effects of sports related brain injuries.

Most concerning, a lack of awareness exists among athletes, parents and coaches about the symptoms of concussions and the susceptibility of young athletes to suffer serious damage as a result of second impacts that occur when playing concussed. "When we operate on young people whose brains have been traumatized, they're hyper-dynamic — the vessels are dilated. If you take that brain after a concussion while the child is still symptomatic and hit it again, long-term damage will result," stated Dr. Hunt Batjer, neurosurgeon and co-chair of the NFL Head, Neck and Spine Medical Committee at a recent Brain Research Foundation panel discussion.

The expert panel took on the critical topic of sports-related brain injuries in children. While much has been publicized about brain injuries among current and past NFL players, the Foundation has identified a scarcity of concrete information relating to the risks of young athletes sustaining brain injuries in a variety of sports.

Panel members included: H. Hunt Batjer, M.D., neurosurgeon and co-chair of the NFL Head, Neck and Spine Medical Committee; Carrie A Jaworski, M.D., Head Team Physician for Northwestern University; Rick Telander, former football player for Northwestern and lead sports columnist for the Chicago Sun-Times and Sports Illustrated; and Dan McGrath, journalist for Chicago News Cooperative and president of Leo High School. The moderator was Bennett Leventhal, M.D., Professor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at New York University. "It's a misconception that football provides the greatest risk of brain injuries," Dr. Batjer commented. "In the NCAA, the highest risk is women's hockey; second is women's soccer; and third is men's football." The risk of serious head injury is too often associated strictly with football, whereas high risk exists for both boys and girls in a number of field sports. Educating staff and parents across all sports about the signs of concussions is fundamental to reducing and eliminating the considerable risk associated with a second hit to the head.

The athlete's desire to get back in the game was cited as one of the biggest barriers to identifying and treating concussions. Symptoms of concussion are not limited to black-outs and many athletes ignore more subtle symptoms, putting them at risk for second impacts. Also, many athletes mislead their trainer or doctor so that they are allowed back onto the field. Today many universities conduct baseline testing of athletes that includes both a comprehensive history as well as a neuropsychological computer-based test. "In the event an athlete sustains a concussion, we can compare their performance before and after the event in order to determine if they're ready to play again," said Dr. Jaworski.

Dr. Batjer is encouraged by research that may identify a genetic predisposition to long-term damage caused by concussive events. "At some point down the road, a physician may be able to tell a parent that if his or her child plays a contact sport there's an increased likelihood of permanent injury. A group of researchers

and engineers are convening to look at the ways we can measure impacts, assess new materials for protecting athletes and adopt some of the science that's being used to protect soldiers from blast injuries," he added.
The panel discussion marked the launch of the Brain Research Foundation's initiative to increase awareness of the dangers of sports-related injuries and fund research that will ultimately lead to safer experiences for young athletes. "The kind of research-based assessment that Northwestern is doing is one measure that could more widely be implemented throughout all of youth sports," stated Terre Sharma, Ph.D., Executive Director of the Brain Research Foundation. "But we believe that research in the field can be greatly expanded to understand what is required to protect our children."
Rick Telander has reported extensively on the topic of brain injury in football and has witnessed numerous life-threatening injuries both as a reporter and Division I football player. "The first thing I would say to players is you have one brain, so think about it as something special," Telander stated.

About the Brain Research Foundation | www.thebrf.org

The Brain Research Foundation supports cutting-edge neuroscience research and programming that leads to novel treatments and prevention of all neurological diseases in children and adults. We deliver this commitment through seed grants, which provide initial funding for innovative research projects, as well as educational programs for researchers and the general public.

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