

# Wounded athletes persevere

Wounded athletes rehabilitate their bodies as sports medicine progresses; returning to the game appears promising

By Steven Weldon  
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...man year of high school PE, good ol' free day, whatever sport you wanted. My sport of choice, well. All day, every day. I wanted to get as good as my workouts were in a mere six weeks. My go-to move split the defenders and get an open basket. It had been years. My slight frame and surprising agility split the defenders off guard, leaving them wondering what happened. In the midst of a game, I did just this. The same way I had been doing it, but this time I lost my footing. I rolled away, as I lay on the court. I clutched my left wrist, actually, it was just a dislocation of the place.

Well, more than a tad. My hand was elevated above the place it normally is. I had never in my life seen this gruesomeness. I used the only reaction I knew at my young age, a scream so loud people in Seattle no doubt heard me.

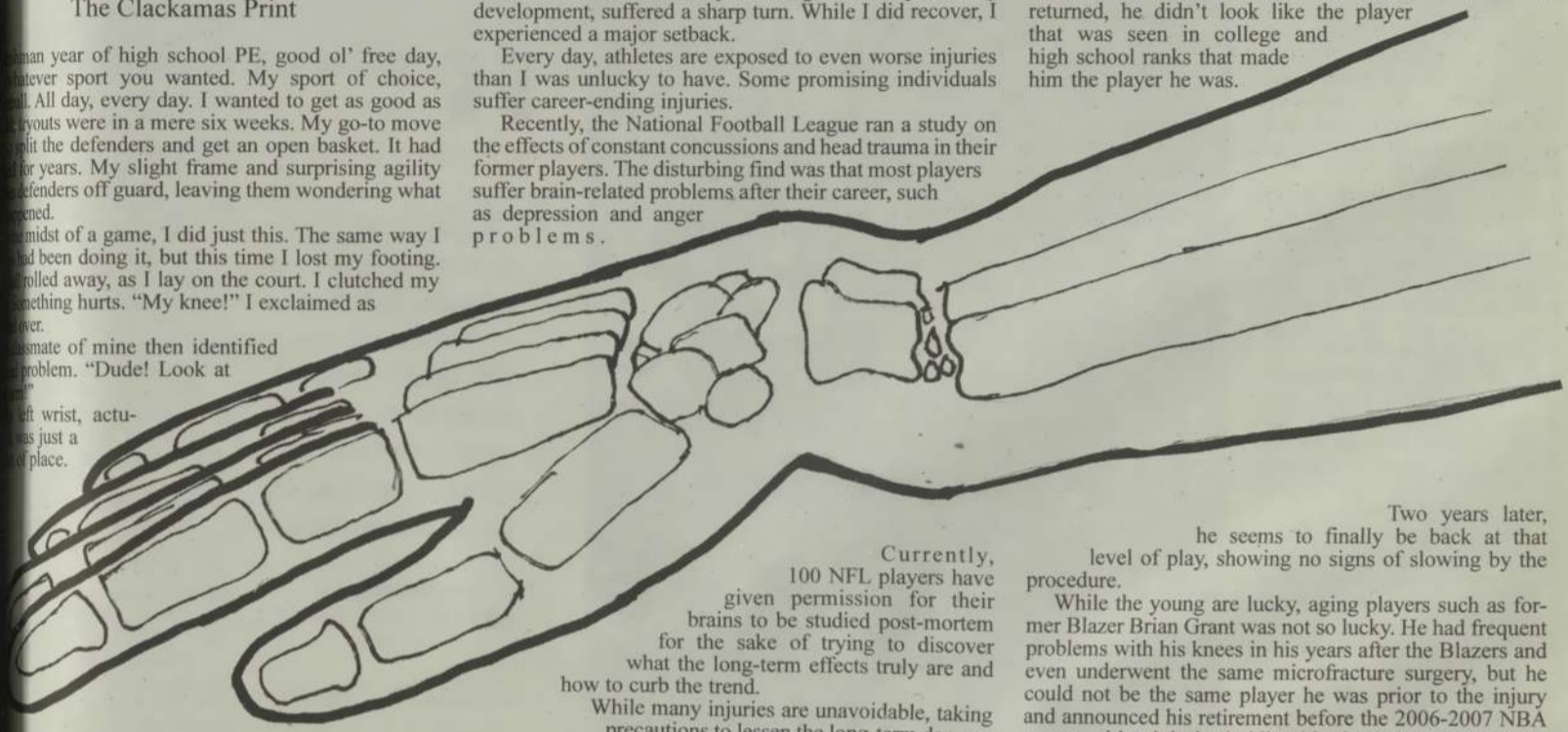
Turns out I broke my left wrist in two places. I was trapped in a cast for eight weeks. The worst part? I am a lefty in every sport. Basketball team dreams? Down the drain, at least for my freshman year. Coincidentally, that was my best and only shot at making the team in the future. Since then, my shooting, once in promising development, suffered a sharp turn. While I did recover, I experienced a major setback.

Every day, athletes are exposed to even worse injuries than I was unlucky to have. Some promising individuals suffer career-ending injuries.

Recently, the National Football League ran a study on the effects of constant concussions and head trauma in their former players. The disturbing find was that most players suffer brain-related problems after their career, such as depression and anger problems.

Now a quick yet complicated procedure can create new cartilage and get an athlete back to form without replacing the entire knee. It's called microfracture surgery. The surgeon creates tiny fractures in the bone, generating new cartilage from a clot. For many who only play sports infrequently, with physical therapy the recovery time is around four months. Professional athletes, who have undergone the surgery though, have a much longer road to travel.

Most recently, the Portland Trail Blazers' center Greg Oden had the surgery in September 2007 and missed his entire would-be rookie season because of it. When he returned, he didn't look like the player that was seen in college and high school ranks that made him the player he was.



Currently, 100 NFL players have been given permission for their brains to be studied post-mortem for the sake of trying to discover what the long-term effects truly are and how to curb the trend.

While many injuries are unavoidable, taking precautions to lessen the long-term damage is the key to stifling their effects.

In basketball, knees take a huge toll. So much so that the cartilage in the joints will break down. In the past, this might have called for a knee replacement surgery.

Two years later, he seems to finally be back at that level of play, showing no signs of slowing by the procedure.

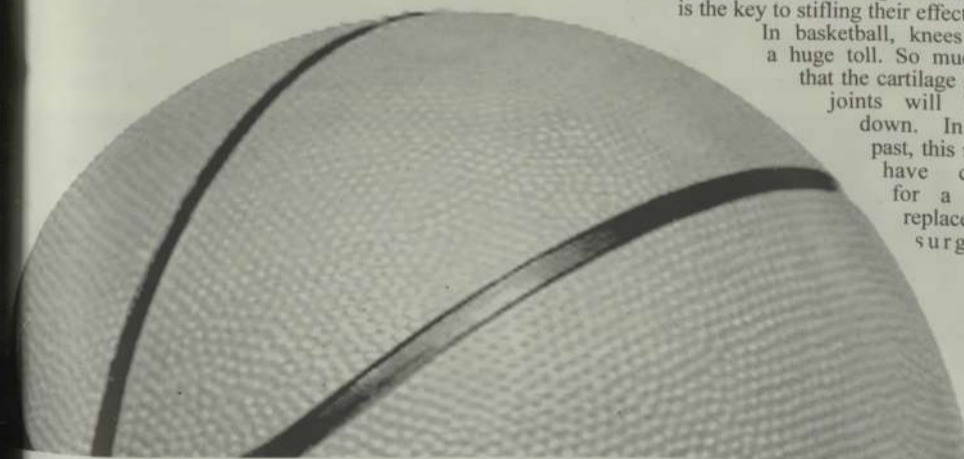
While the young are lucky, aging players such as former Blazer Brian Grant was not so lucky. He had frequent problems with his knees in his years after the Blazers and even underwent the same microfracture surgery, but he could not be the same player he was prior to the injury and announced his retirement before the 2006-2007 NBA season, citing injuries holding him back from his original form as his reason to leave the game.

Closer to home, the Cougars soccer team had a few players suffer from injuries. Head coach Tracy Nelson noted that one of her players suffered a torn ACL (Anterior Cruciate Ligament), which requires six months for a recovery with extensive physical therapy.

Soccer players have a very tough time with injuries because of the physicality and stress put on the legs. Common injuries include ankle injuries, knee injuries and pulled muscles. However, the Cougars have a huge help with these injuries.

"We are lucky to have a great trainer [Kevin Arizo] who works daily with our student athletes in rehab and getting them back on the field in a timely manner," said Nelson.

While injuries can be devastating to an athlete's career, with proper treatment and care, the injury's long term effects can be lessened. Great advances in sports medicine have made this possible, and maybe in the future players can come back faster and better than before.



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