

Jason Belser Discusses Concussion and the NFL

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Jason Belser: Hello. My name is Jason Belser. I played 11 years in the National Football League; 9 with the Indianapolis Colts, 2 with the Kansas City Chiefs. While I was a player, I was on the Board of Player Reps, which is a 32-member board that makes the decisions from the players' standpoint in the National Football League Players Association. After that I was elected to the Executive Committee and spent four years there working with Gene Upshaw, former executive director. Since retirement, I've now been at the NFL Players Association for almost six years working under our new executive DeMaurice Smith, and that's been a fantastic, wonderful ride.

First concussion in college. Didn't go out, but I know I was concussed -- you see little dots. It's almost like a -- they're flies that you can't touch, but you can see them. I could hear everything, but I know that I was incoherent from the standpoint that I couldn't respond, but I knew I could move my legs and my arms. After probably about 30 seconds, maybe a minute, I got up off the field with the help of my trainers and went to the sideline and just tried to get myself together. This was in the first half. Didn't go back in the game until after halftime. Things became clear again.

Concussions that I know I've played through? -- Kind of the same thing, after a hard hit, you may see some spots or stars, but you don't want to leave that field. And if you've got your buddy there with you you'll tell him, "Hey, make sure I'm all right, I'm playing -- I'm playing a little bit deeper than I normally would right now. If I can't remember this play when it's called in from the sideline, make sure you get it." I've probably done that probably about three or four times in my career. And you always just hope as a defensive back a deep ball isn't thrown. And I was fortunate enough where that wasn't the case, but, you know I think the guys are much smarter now.

The education we give them around concussions, there are some things that we're building into our education information to the players where we want them to be aware of the risk and, you know, I don't know, I can't speak for every player in the National Football League, but I can tell you this, that as a representative of the NFL Players Association we're doing everything we can to make sure they're informed about the risk and the dangers of concussions. But ultimately on Sunday the player has to decide what he plays with and what he plays through.

I think the League has moved towards taking some responsibility on the concussion issue. They've adopted some of things that we've demanded -- having a neurologist, an independent neurologist on the sidelines; return to play guidelines must be diagnosed; be asymptomatic before return to play; information on the technology that's out there from the manufacturers.

I think they're more, a little bit more inclined to want to be partners with the NFL Players Association on health and safety which should be the case, because we're both affected by it,

the NFL and the NFL Players Association, and we both have a fiduciary responsibility to give the players the best care and treatment that they possibly can get. And I know from our standpoint, the Players Association will always do that.

If you look at guys like Sean Morey, Matt Birk, guys that have donated their brains, myself, one. We're doing that because we want answers. Whether those answers come up in 5 years, whether they come up in 10 years, whether they come up in 15 years, we all want to be part of solution and not a part of problem. The problem is, is that guys didn't diagnose -- weren't diagnosed, they didn't tell of their condition or their symptoms. So the only way we can come to a finding and make this where guys don't have to be concerned, hopefully -- and there's advancements in technology when dealing with concussions -- is that they know the risk, you know, and that's what we're all in this for.

We want each and ever player that puts a helmet on, on Sunday, and decides to play through a concussion, or comes back to a game and hasn't been diagnosed because he hasn't told the team doctor or trainer about his condition, we want them to know the risk, you know. If everyone knows the risk, then they can decide for themselves how risky they want to be, or if at all. And like I was telling you earlier, you know, the guys that played before us, they didn't have that opportunity, they didn't have that opportunity.