

## Opinions

## Brains before brawn



**Sam Calvert**  
Columnist

Bam—shoulder pads crush against one another. Smash—a helmet cracks with force as

it makes contact with another. The audience members witness moments that cause a grimace or two while observing brutal football games. They even cross their fingers when the courageous competitors are escorted off the field with torn tendons or broken bones. But what of the injuries that are invisible and whose symptoms don't resurface until much, much later?

Recently, coverage of professional sporting events and participants has been flooded with an influx of debate about injuries sustained during competition. The most common injuries happen to be concussions sustained by professionals playing in the National Football League.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have released a public service announcement reminiscent of the "Talk to your kids about drugs" commercials that have been running for over 10 years—this time warning

football players to take their head injuries more seriously.

A traumatic brain injury, the most common of which is a concussion, can occur any time the head is jolted, whether or not actual contact takes place. It can result in a loss of consciousness, dizziness, lapses in memory and headaches. It can also be devoid of any symptoms at all. Research shows a direct link between concussions and epilepsy, and an increased risk of Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease and other age-related diseases.

Besides the risk of neurological and cognitive damage, an athlete who suffers multiple mild concussions in a matter of weeks can die.

Unfortunately, a major stipulation in dealing with head injuries is the recognition and admission of the player that he is hurt. Since some concussion symptoms are not recognizable, it would be difficult for a player to notify a coach or trainer about changes in performance.

In the wake of a loss to the Baltimore Ravens after Pittsburgh Steelers' quarterback Ben Roethlisberger sat out because of concussion symptoms, Steelers' wide receiver Hines Ward told reporter Bob Costas that players often lie to doctors in order to get cleared to play.

He said that it was "just" a concussion and emphasized the

idea that players do not think about the future when it comes to playing in the league. He said they are only worried about playing every game they can.

In response, Congress requested that the league turn over all players' medical records to be examined. The commissioner of the NFL, Roger Goodell, has also put in place stricter policies in dealing with players who exhibit concussion-like symptoms.

In the NFL, the average athlete plays for three and a half years. There are 16 games in the regular season, with a possibility of three playoff games and the Super Bowl — if the team is lucky. That amounts to 56 to 70 days a player gets to be out on the field for a game, and that's if he does not suffer any injuries during that three-and-a-half year span.

Thus, each game, each quarter and each minute is precious, so players avoid missing games at all costs.

In an Associated Press poll this season, almost one-fifth of the 160 NFL players surveyed admitted to hiding or downplaying concussion symptoms. But in a sport where 35 years of age is considered old, life after football is a real concern.

Sure, the game is fun and the hits are thrilling, but brain function should not be sacrificed for 60 minutes on the field.

## Calling the kettle black



**Sarah Costello**  
Columnist

On Christmas day, 2009, the world came close to observing an airborne tragedy when Nigerian Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab allegedly attempted to detonate a bomb while aboard a Northwest airliner en route to Detroit. The Nigerian claimed to have been trained in Yemen under the instruction of al-Qaida.

Had he succeeded in igniting the explosives harbored in his underwear, he would have ended the lives of himself and those on the aircraft in seconds.

Following the near attack, airports worldwide amped up security, delaying passengers and creating general chaos for people traveling during one of the busiest months of the year. Metropolitan airports, including Chicago's O'Hare and Amsterdam's Schiphol, made plans to install both human and computer-screened full-body scanners, which many claimed could have prevented the Nigerian from boarding Northwest flight 253.

The scanners are high-tech X-ray machines, capable of exposing areas beneath a passenger's clothing and produce a detailed image of every scanned individual. The use of these scanners has ignited controversy from many who claim the X-ray images violate privacy. The high cost of these machines is also a concern. According to a Dec. 29 Reuter's article, the scanners are 10 times more expensive than traditional metal detectors, which run for about \$15,000.

Despite the push for body scanners, emerging evidence suggests the existence of intelligence that could have prevented the Abdulmutallab incident, had the U.S. intelligence community heeded previous warnings.

"Two officials said the government had intelligence from Yemen before Friday that leaders of a branch of al-Qaida were talking about 'a Nigerian' being prepared for a terrorist attack," wrote Peter Baker and Carl Hulse of the New York Times in a Dec. 29 article.

In November, the Nigerian's father contacted officials at the U.S. embassy in Abuja, Nigeria, voicing concerns for his son's radicalism. Though a file existed with Abdulmutallab's name, officials said they did not possess the evidence necessary for placing the Nigerian on the "no-fly" list.

Despite many signals, the Homeland Security threat level was not raised. The Nigerian flew from Lagos to Amsterdam. Though the Nigerian police force is riddled with corruption and counter-terrorism methods are unstable at best, Abdulmutallab should never have been allowed to board Northwest flight 253 when he arrived in Amsterdam. He did and came disconcertingly close to succeeding his heinous plot.

Adding to the frustration of many Americans was the claim made by Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano that "the system worked," despite the clear breach of security. The statement had many anxious Americans questioning the Obama administration and the actions taken toward countering terrorism.

Several days after the failed attack, Obama made a speech acknowledging the incident could have been prevented had "critical information been shared."

No amount of blame or what-ifs can change the past, and even expensive equipment will not always thwart the missions of our enemies. In the past few months, Americans have witnessed actions of violence from the brutal Fort Hood massacre to the Nigerian bombing incident. The question remains: what are we going to do about it?

Increasing security and spending millions of dollars might work in the short term, but the answer lies in intelligence and identification of our enemies. Obama has recently taken steps to improve intelligence operations and correct "systematic failures" that contributed to the Dec. 25 attack attempt. But "fixing" security methods will not obliterate the problem. In fact, sole dependence on intelligence and high-tech gizmos could ignite a fire of trouble we cannot even imagine. These are not just radicals or random trouble seekers — these attacks are conducted by terrorists.

It is time to start calling the kettle black. Forget about political correctness and a fear of "jumping to conclusions." Future protection of the United States will require Obama to step outside his comfort zone and take a stand against the enemy. Our safety depends on it.

## Foreseeing the future



**Christina Edwards**  
Columnist

In 1999, when most Elon students were barely reaching out of childhood into adolescence and Y2K fears of technological destruction were running rampant, the Disney channel debuted an original made-for-television movie titled "Zenon: Girl of the 21st Century." The title character of the film, and the majority of the

central characters, live on a space craft designed to act as its own city outside of Earth. The technology, fashion and lingo marked a distant future—yet the movie was set in 2049.

It is now 2010, still 39 years from the aforementioned Disney deadline. We survived Y2K and moved on to a world accessorized by various incarnations of the iPod and informed by the constant stream of Twitter.

So, maybe we're not exactly living in space and attending concerts via hologram yet. But the changes in the past 10 years—and the ones to come in the next decade—are nevertheless major and vital to the structure of society and communication.

In the present, the collective curiosity of society is focused on the ever-growing reach of the Internet and massive scope and power of social networking Web sites.

Information travels at an unprecedented speed, thanks to the immediacy and relative accessibility

of constant information available on Web sites like Twitter and Facebook. The constant connection via text alerts to various Web sites, applications and people, and the availability of wireless compatibility on everything from your phone to your MP3 player, ensures the option to stay informed constantly.

And if you're not, then you've definitely missed something. In our new world of hyper-connectivity, a news story that broke five minutes ago may as well have taken place yesterday.

Surely, these trends and developments create informed citizens of the world and have changed our global community into something more closely resembling a well-intentioned, gossiping small town. Still, potential hazards pose significant threats. There are already centers cropping up to deal with Internet addiction, an affliction predicted to only get worse as access and speed of information increases.

The ability to send out information, while convenient, leaves holes in accuracy levels. And the increasing trend of saving and accessing personal information stored online could lead to potentially massive privacy and property issues.

Like any future prospect, our blazing future in networking is two-sided. But regardless of positives or negatives, the changes to come are imminent.

It's important for us to keep in mind that the future is never as far off as we think it is, and the most relevant aspects aren't necessarily incongruous to what we're doing and where we're living now. The most vital issue pertaining to our future is likely going to be simply staying in the loop.

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