

Huebner, B. (1998, September 28). The Hits Keep Coming. The Boston Globe, pp. C1, C4.
Silver, M. (1998, October 26). Sports Illustrated, pp. 46-57.

OVERVIEW

I don't know the physics to calculate the force generated by to 330 pound linemen hitting at full speed, but it must be significant. (In September of 1998 it was determined that there were 279 NFL players at least 300 pounds in weight.) And it's been estimated that solid contact between linemen, sometimes two on one,

takes place forty times a game. Sixteen games a season. Fifty times a week in practice. Fifty times a day in training camp. That's 2,530 pounding collisions a season, crunching a spine that, likely as not, will protest sooner or later. (Huebner)

Dr. Warren King is team physician for the Oakland Raiders, and he has thought about this:

In a 10-year career, figure it out, lineman is the one position of the field that makes contact with another player all the time, and often contact with multiple players.

One study reported that 50 percent of football players complain of lower back pain before they get out of college. Another study determined 50 percent of linemen who work out of a three-point stance showed X-ray evidence of wear and tear on their lower spine.

It's the occupational hazard of playing football. You're taking very large men who are very strong and having them hit each other as hard as possible. (Dr. Kevin P. Speer, professor of orthopedic surgery and team physician at Duke University)

Teams are trying to compensate for this reality by having players reduce weight off season, stay in better shape year-round, and "emphasizing technique rather than impact during practice."

Silver's story takes the story of American football violence a step further. Some fans were surprised at the spitting incidents that came out in 1997-98. All were aware at occasional late hits and spearing opponents with helmets which brought immediate penalties and later fines. But few realized what was going on in the pile-ups and line play. This article is a shocking description of the nastiest and cheapest shots.

Kevin Gogan, guard of the San Francisco 49ers is given credit for being number one bad boy. A former teammate, Dana Stubblefield, experienced Gogan's dirty antics in practice and watched his punching, kicking (often to the groin), tripping, and cut-blocking on game days:

If those guys in the striped uniforms can't see it, Gogan will do it. He knows every trick in the dirty book. In fact, in the Book of Dirty, Gogan's picture is right there on the first page, with a note that says, 'We dedicate this to Kevin Gogan, the epitome of what dirtiness stands for, the master of all that is nasty.'

The 49ers coach, Steve Mariucci says:

Coaches want tough guys, players who love to hit and fly around and do things that are mean and nasty. Not everyone can be like that, but if you can have one or two players who are a little overaggressive, that's great.

Cut-blocking, or going for an opponents knees away from the ball is frowned upon but still legal in the NFL. Kansas City Chief's coach Marty Schottenheimer is accused by opposing players of encouraging late hits and knockout blows. Here is how he defended his team's practice of cut-blocking:

We do it because if we knock those guys down, they get fewer uncontested shots on the man with the ball, and that reduces fumbles. If they want to make a rule outlawing cutting in that situation, I'll be happy to abide by it.

In a 1996 game Packers' center, Winters, put a late hit on bad guy Fuller of the Vikings. Infuriated Fuller gouged Winters in the eye. Winters was fined \$5,000 for the late hit; Fuller \$30,000 for the gouge. Here's how Gogan decided to handle Fuller:

I was walking of the field before a punt and Fuller was yapping at one of our special teams guys...So I said, 'Buck, watch this,' and as I walked by I punched him right in the nuts.

The SI article goes on to outline the chief offenses of "The Dirty Dozen."

Spitter Bill Romanowski of the Broncos: fined \$20,000 for breaking quarterback Kerry Collins's jaw with a helmet to head hit, and about whom another NFC quarterback says: 'He goes for the kill shot every time.'

Veteran dirty guy Ralph Tamm, center for Chiefs: accomplished dirty player, punched Raider Chester McGlockton of Denver in the groin in 1995.

Corey Fuller, cornerback for Vikings: spitter and trash talker, another NFC quarterback says: 'He's always bragging about how he's going to hurt you. Then he comes in late and hits up high with his helmet.'

Mark Carrier, safety with the Lions: tackles with his helmet; suspension without pay (\$27,941 for sidelining Brice Hunter of Bucs).

Similar characteristics and offenses are listed for Dave Widel (Falcons), Frank Winters (Packers), Erik Williams (Cowboys), Eric Swann (Cardinals), Rodney Harrison (Chargers), Todd Steussle (Vikings), William Fuller (Chargers), and Kevin Gogan (49ers).

The league has taken action to reduce dirty tricks. Their fines are beginning to make a change. John Teerlinck, was a pass-rushing coach, a source of dirty tactics according to some. When he was assistant head coach of the Detroit Lions for defense, he was called to New York for a meeting with commissioner Paul Tagliabue and other league officials. After watching video tapes, he was warned that this sort of thing would no longer be tolerated and that heavy fines would be exacted on offending players. Some admit, others complain, that such action is taming the game to some extent.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Why do people...even some peaceful and gentle folk, like to watch professional football so much? Why do more boys and men enjoy it than girls and women?

2. Is violence celebrated in American football and in the sport of hockey?
3. Is this article one way to bring social approbation against those who play dirty? Why or why not? Do you favor heavy fines and suspension to players who commit flagrant personal fouls?

IMPLICATIONS

1. American football can be a violent and popular game.
2. There does seem to be a basic aggressive characteristic in all of us, in men particularly (Gurian, 1996 agrees; Pollack, 1998 does not). Football may also remind us of battles. For those who played collegiate sports, watching may be nostalgically pleasant; for some who didn't there is make-up in a vicarious experience.
3. The strategy, discipline, teamwork, and individual skills are part of one's interest in contact sports.
4. Teams also seem to enhance community or regional spirit. A high-ranking politician threw his arms around a taxi-cab driver when the Washington (D.C.) was triumphant; the whole city celebrated together.
5. High-paid athletes are celebrities in societies today. As such, they are role models whether they wish to be or not. Sound character and positive behavior must be strongly encouraged. Fortunately, there are many fine role models in all sports today.

Dean Borgman cCYS