



ust remember, we live in a cynical world.

The NFL is about to do a massively right thing by pulling out of its huge bank account as much as \$800 million to help thousands of former players who are or may begin suffering from the effects of concussions suffered during their playing days.

Reaction to the NFL's unprecedented concussion lawsuit settlement has been both fast and predictable and cynical. Where some see it as the NFL doing the right thing others see it as not nearly enough. Maybe they just can't comprehend the scope of how big of a settlement pot nearly \$800 million really is. Then there is the predictable group that has decided in the players shouldn't get a thing. They knew the risks. We'll get to that group in a minute.

There's never been an effective way to place a monetary value on a human life and there never will be. In that sense, the carping about the size of the payout isn't a surprise. Is someone suffering from Parkinson's deserving of \$3 or 4 million? Is that too much or simply not enough? Who really can say?

Lost though in this aspect of the discussion is the simple fact that the NFL stepped up and got this massive lawsuit settled in very short order. With nearly 4,500 plaintiffs in the purported class action lawsuit, the litigation could easily have taken years just to get through the preliminary wrangling without any of the lawyers breaking much of a sweat. Indeed the parties were wrangling over whether the case should be heard in court or by an arbitrator. A ruling was due and whichever way it went the other side would appeal. It could have been years before the parties ever got to the merits of the case.

Lingering Items--Concussions Edition

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

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But this wasn't a lawsuit about someone having water in the basement. There was real suffering by thousands of former players whose brains and lives got scrambled doing the only thing they ever really were trained to do. The more the litigation promised to drag on, the worse they would get. Many would have died in the interim. Many already have. For all the criticism the NFL gets about its supposed indifference to the needs of retirees, from questions about pensions, to health care, to compensation for past injuries, it was instrumental in putting together an unprecedented, complicated, expensive settlement that promises to provide real relief and benefit to the victims of its violent sport.

There are always aspects of any settlement that anyone can quibble with. For example, one of the criticisms is that the NFL has only committed \$10 million of the settlement toward additional research, which in a vacuum seems woefully insufficient. But the broader picture on that subject is the NFL has funded hundreds of millions in research already, continues to do so outside the context of the lawsuit and is committing even more money to that effort.

There's no question that the NFL has had a mixed history of dealing with the players who made the league the economic juggernaut it is today. And there's no question here that the league had an economic motive to get the case settled. At the very least the more it dragged on the more likely there would be revelations embarrassing to the league as one of the key allegations in the suit is that the league deliberately hid the medical consequences of concussions for years from its players.

But wrangling over the motive to settle is to miss the relative speed with which the NFL will be getting financial relief to those in distress. The league essentially paid a settlement that is in the range of what it stood to lose in the litigation anyway and so it's pretty safe to assume that it indeed understood and underplayed the medical impact of multiple concussions. It's also pretty safe to assume that it wanted to provide real relief to these players and it has.

There's never an adequate way to compensate a person financially when he's otherwise lost the essence of himself through an injury. It's unlikely that the thousands of players suffering from the effects of multiple concussions will ever have their medical fates reversed. But at least the men who find themselves unable to care for their families and the families who are struggling to take care of these men in a dignified way can ease those burdens with a substantial pot of money. It may be crass but that doesn't mean it won't make it easier.

The NFL should be applauded for actually doing the right thing, particularly since the public default tends to be that the NFL never does the right thing. Could it have done more? Probably. It also could have done less. There were lives at stake. There still are. At least the sides are united in the common goal of providing for those who sacrificed so much to make so many others rich.

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Then there are the "they knew the risks" jerks who feel like the former players really don't deserve a penny. Pete Prisco, a columnist of sorts with CBSsports.com, leads this pack. Prisco, aiming for provocation where understanding would be the better motive decided that this settlement was indeed the right moment to make a name for himself at the expense of others by deliberately taking an intellectually dishonest point of view. He equated the settlement to a money grab by the ex-players who knew the risks of their sport and now, essentially, are suffering as much from buyer's remorse as anything else.

It's a crowded platform on the internet. Columnists are rewarded on the number of clicks they get and so the hot take like the one from Prisco is designed to garner him traffic. That's why I won't provide a link here. The less clicks, the better.

The retirees' lawsuit was actually about the very issue Prisco claims was incontrovertible—the known risks of the sport. Concussions have always been a part of the mix, certainly. But the science of concussions has evolved over the years as increased research has more definitively established the long term effects of concussions. When the NFL knew this was a key to the entire lawsuit. So despite what Prisco says, it isn't true that the risks of playing football have been known for years other than in a general sense.

Jackasses like Prisco come and go. His work on this issue underscores that he would be best sticking to discussing the societal implications of third and long. Where Prisco didn't go but could have and maybe should have is to discuss all the players who still have an almost open hostility toward the league's efforts to make their workplace safer.

Complain all you want about the NFL's past conduct but you can't deny the NFL's strong push

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in recent years to improve the safety of the sport through literally dozens of rule changes. These range from rules designed to limit kick returns to changes in equipment, like the mandating of thigh and knee pads, to the outlawing of helmet to helmet hits.

And yet each time it implements a new rule there is the usual reaction from dozens if not hundreds of players that the league is sissifying the sport. "Why not make it flag football" or "let's put a dress on them" are the usual, tired reactions from the players. When a thug like James Harrison deliberately goes out of his way to injure to members of the Browns in the same game and is suspended for it, he tears into the NFL Commissioner and does so with the backing of his teammates and dozens of other players around the league. It's simply scandalous that Harrison and his ilk are allowed to remain in the game and perhaps even more scandalous that he and his type aren't called out on their behavior by their union leaders.

Frankly the players are their own worst enemies when it comes to player safety. It's part of the "warrior" mentality that gets ingrained from Pop Warner on forward that they should play in pain and rub a little dirt on the injury.

In that sense it can be a little frustrating to hear about these kinds of settlements, but only in that sense. Players do bear some culpability for the lifelong effects many suffer from a result of the sport they played. Players and their union representatives constantly work at cross purposes from the league in terms of player safety. And while the specific long term effects of things like concussions are still far from being completely understood, there is no question that players today can and should better understand they are involved in an inherently dangerous activity.

That all said, nothing in that equation relieves the league of its duty as an employer to provide a safe working environment for its workers. Short of banning the sport there probably is no way of making the sport risk free, but that's not the goal anyway. The real goal is transparency. Players are entitled to the full range of disclosures on all the risks inherent in the activities they undertake on the field. Only then can they truly make an intelligent decision about whether or not to take those risks.

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In this context, it's actually fascinating to read about the travails of Robert Griffin III and the

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Washington Redskins. Griffin, after suffering serious leg and knee injuries last season, has been cleared to play in the season opener next week. Yet according to reports from ESPN, Griffin's own doctor, the well respected Dr. James Andrew, has strongly suggested that the Redskins are risking further injury to their prized asset by continuing to use him as they did last season.

In other words, Andrews believes that allowing Griffin to be exposed to the constant pounding that a read option quarterback takes will be at the risk of losing Griffin again. No one much is commenting on whether Andrews indeed made that recommendation though Redskins head coach Mike Shanahan eluded to as much by saying that the team needed to talk to Griffin about the issues related to his medical clearance.

I actually think it's too cynical to suggest that the Redskins won't follow Andrews' recommendations, but those recommendations do put the team and the player in a quandary and it's just that kind of quandary played out over decade after decade of professional football that eventually leads to the kinds of litigation that the NFL just settled.

Griffiin's issues aren't concussion related but they carry significant long term health risks nonetheless. But Griffin wasn't drafted just to hand off the football or sit back in the pocket. His strong arm and swift feet are his true stock in trade and when perfectly combined it's really a thing of beauty to watch.

For Griffin, the long term health risks are well known and established. He has the transparency to the process that players should have. But he'll likely ignore them. He has a contract to live up to and another to grab down the road. NFL football represents his best path to lifetime financial freedom. He'd be better served to reinvent himself as a pocket passer but it carries a tremendous amount of risk as well. What if it doesn't work? What if he becomes Derek Anderson? You can see the high level calculus Griffin wrestles with as he confronts these issues and then you start to understand why players put themselves in harm's way even when they know very specifically that harm awaits them.

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The Browns' lack of depth is once again being exposed as injuries mount during training camp. Until the depth on the team improves significantly, the record won't tick up appreciably. Still, this week's question to ponder isn't about injuries: When was the last time a team went through its final cuts and ended up with no place kickers on the roster?