

## Six Feet Under Because Of The NFL

Some say that football is in the blood of Americans. It is more than a sport; it is a way of life. From high school football to the NFL, this sport is consuming the lives of sports fanatics, literally. The documentary, *League of Denial: The NFL's Concussion Crisis*, details the brain damage associated with former NFL players. During the rise of the addressed issues, the NFL practiced bad public relations in more ways than one. The following address the conditions of former NFL players and the NFL's responses.

Mike Webster, former NFL Steelers player died at the age of 50 after displaying mental illness for the remaining years of his life. Bennet Omalu, Medical Examiner of Mike Webster discovered CTE, Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy in Webster's brain. Omalu noted the unusualness of this disease and wondered if there was a relation with football to this traumatic injury. He later confirmed CTE in more NFL players. Omalu decided to share his findings with the NFL. The returned response verbally shot down Omalu. The NFL stated that his findings were wrong and that he was not worthy of his science because he was not a 'real' doctor. This began the chronic illness crisis in the NFL (Frontline).

As part of good PR practices, organizations should attempt to follow the Conflict Management Life Cycle in order to avoid a crisis (Wilcox). The NFL first failed, as it should have been managing the issues right as they developed. Instead of making behavioral changes to attempt to redirect and resolve the conflict, the NFL decided to put together a committee to do research on its own. The problem with this is that the NFL appointed a doctor who already believed that concussions had

no effect on the lives of football players. The strategic phase was created, but unethically addressed as the NFL appointed members to their committee that were held a bias in favor of the NFL (Frontline). This was no longer a conflict; this had turned into a crisis.

The NFL verbally attacked Omalu and denied that it was in the wrong. They did not create an excuse. They remained in the denial phase without taking responsibility for the crisis (Wilcox). There were no other strategies in play for responding to this crisis, except denial. The examination of former NFL player, Junior Seau's brain confirmed that CTE was in fact existent. The NFL dug itself a deeper hole. One night at a high-end restaurant a journalist received confidential paper work about a study that had been done through the NFL. This study confirmed chronic injuries, like CTE correlate with playing football. Even though the proven information was leaked, the NFL continued to say that the link between CTE and football was unclear (Frontline).

The NFL did not address this crisis in the right way. If they would have been proactive and addressed the issues from the beginning, the crisis could have been minimized and concluded with corrective action and a full apology. The NFL's fear of the end of football was just as strong as its ego, resulting in negative press. The long-term condition of NFL players remains a concern.

Frontline. PBS. (2013). League of Denial: The NFL's Concussion Crisis.

Wilcox, L. D., & Cameron, T. G., & Reber, H. B. (2015). Public Relations: Strategies and Tactics. United States of America: Pearson Education.