



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Daniel L. Squadron

Senator Squadron Joins Parents and Doctors to Protect Young Athletes Against Concussions

DANIEL L. SQUADRON February 1, 2010

One Week Before Launch Of National Campaign At Super Bowl, Senator Announces Legislation To Put NY At Forefront Of Protecting Youth From Brain Injuries

Squadron Calls for Tough, First-Ever Statewide Safety Rules and Standards as Evidence of Long-Term Effects of Mishandled Head Injuries Mounts

New York, NY – State Senator Daniel Squadron joined young athletes, parents, coaches, medical professionals, and brain injury experts from around New York today to announce new legislation that would require mandatory training for coaches in recognizing head injuries and the symptoms of concussions, and ensure that student athletes who sustain concussions are not permitted to compete until they have been cleared by a medical professional. The announcement comes as a national spotlight shines on the prevalence and long-term ramifications of traumatic brain injuries sustained in youth athletics.

Standing with Senator Squadron Sunday morning was Patrick B. Donohue Esq., who founded the Sarah Jane Brain Institute after his daughter sustained a traumatic brain injury. Mr. Donohue will publicly announce next week during Super Bowl week the launch of the Zackery Lystedt Brain Project, a national initiative to have youth sports concussion

legislation passed in all 50 states. Senator Squadron and Mr. Donohue were joined by players, parents, and coaches from the Downtown Giants, a Manhattan youth football team that won last year's national championship game. Also joining Senator Squadron to support the legislation were Dr. Marie Cavallo, President of the Brain Injury Association of New York State, and Dr. Mark Grudberg of St. Mary's Healthcare System for Children, an organization providing intensive rehabilitation, specialized care, and education to children with special needs and life-limiting conditions.

Senator Squadron's legislation, which is scheduled for a vote at the next meeting of the Senate Education Committee, is based on a similar law in Washington State – called the strongest “return to play” law in the country by brain injury specialists. The law was named for Zackery Lystedt, who fell into a coma after sustaining a concussion while playing football and returning to the game too soon. Senator Squadron announced on Sunday his three-point plan to cut down on the long-term dangers of traumatic brain injuries in youth athletics, which calls for:

- Mandatory training for all coaches involved in youth athletics in recognizing the symptoms of concussions and seeking proper treatment;
- Prohibiting students who exhibit signs or have been diagnosed with concussions from participating in athletics until they have been cleared by a health care professional; and
- Calling on the State Education Department Commissioner to issue new guidelines for safety equipment in school athletics based on national research and standards.

Senator Squadron said, “Organized sports can be one of the most valuable experiences in a young person's life and by making sports safer, we can help ensure that the lasting effects are all positive. If we protect our young athletes today, we can secure their promise for the

future. Requiring proper training for coaches, assuring that injured kids don't return to play without the clearance of a medical professional, and spreading the word about equipment safety are common sense ways to cut down on the most harmful traumatic brain injuries. With this plan, New York has the chance to be on the cutting edge in supporting youth sports while protecting young athletes."

"A seemingly innocent event can have massive ramifications, especially when dealing with the brain of a young person. How long does a brain take to heal from being bruised? How well does a brain heal and what might not heal completely? We don't know, but we're learning," said Louise and George Bryant, whose son Hutch sustained a traumatic brain injury during middle school wrestling practice. "A bruised brain is invisible to the eyes. The effects could be exacerbated if misunderstood or ignored. We were fortunate that the coaches, teachers, and administrators working with our son and us were willing to look and 'see' what was invisible - working with us to safeguard our son's confidence while he gradually regained his academic and athletic life. This awareness continues to be critical, 10 months after he suffered a brain injury in wrestling practice. Early care for brain injuries is crucial for both athletic and academic recovery, and for success in the future. Most people think a concussion is gone in a couple of days and you're fine. This isn't the case."

"We are so pleased that Senate leaders in New York realize the importance of participating in the national initiative to better prevent, identify and treat youth sports concussions. Brain injuries, including sports concussions, are the number one cause of death and disability for children and young adults in the United States, so any effort to reduce their devastating impact on families is to be lauded," said Patrick B. Donohue, Esq., the Founder of the Sarah Jane Brain Foundation (SJBF).

"The Downtown Giants, like any parent, make the safety of our young athletes our top priority. And so we enthusiastically support this important piece of legislation and applaud

Senator Squadron's leadership," said Julian Swearengin, head coach of the championship-winning Midget team of the Downtown Giants football league. "Concussions are serious injuries that require serious care, and medical clearance is absolutely critical before athletes with concussion symptoms return to the field of play. Making such clearance mandatory is a simple step that will go a long way towards protecting our players and their futures."

Senator Kemp Hannon said, "It is imperative that we address the growing issue of traumatic brain injuries and the dangers that they pose to the children of our State. Education and responsive measures regarding concussions can prohibit long term and sometimes permanent effects sustained during sports and recreational activities. I applaud Senator Squadron on his effort to begin legislative work in this area, and I look forward to working alongside Senator Squadron and other legislators on this issue."

Dr. Marie Cavallo, President of the Brain Injury Association of New York State, said, "A concussion is more than just a bump on the head. The potential consequences of a concussion, or multiple concussions, may have a profound impact on an athlete's life and future. The Brain Injury Association of New York State is pleased to be a partner in this effort to promote greater education and information about concussions and safety for our student athletes."

"Every week we hear a story of a college or professional athlete suffering a concussion," said Dr. Edwin Simpser, Chief Medical Officer at St. Mary's Healthcare System for Children. "Too often the story we don't hear is of the high school or youth athlete suffering the same fate and the enormous risk our children face if head injuries are not treated appropriately. The path to decreasing the occurrence of head injuries, begins with increasing education and awareness. Senator Squadron's crucial legislation will lead to better informed coaches, more aware parents, and safer players, and in doing so it will literally save lives."

"The proper management of a concussion is key to keeping athletes safe, making informed decisions about when an athlete should return to play, and significantly reduces the risk of a student athlete sustaining another injury which could result in a permanent brain injury or even death," said Dr. Jay Dunkle, a neuropsychologist who specializes in sports concussion management.