

Hockey is a fast paced violent and physical game that requires a player's full body to be used at all times. Over the course of someone's playing career injury is almost inevitable as you have players crashing into each other full force as just a part of the game. Many people start playing hockey at a very young age and continue throughout their youth and for some even their adulthood. Most of these injuries come as a result of checking, which is when a player intentionally crashes into another player typically either with that player's full body or hip. In most leagues players are allowed to start checking at the peewee level which typically begins at age 11. However, according to an Ohio State study, "The American Academy of Pediatrics has recommended that body checking not be allowed in children under the age of 15." While there are many other risks for injury that come along with the sport checking is one of the most dangerous aspects of the sport Dr. Rajendra Kale, a neurologist interviewed by ABC News had even said, "Such hits led to severe medical problems, including short-term and long-term memory loss, chronic headaches, sleep disorders, mood and behavioral problems, psychiatric changes and even early onset dementia." Injuries like this have been proven to be on the rise as well as time advances on the Ohio State study mentions, "The incidence of hockey-related injuries among children aged 9 to 14 leading to emergency department visits more than doubled between 1990 and 2006... There were 2,935 hockey injuries treated in emergency departments in that age group in

1990, increasing to 7,713 in 2006 - an increase of 163 percent.” Meaning that the prevalence of injuries as a whole is much higher than it had been before, and the likelihood of long term injuries as a result is increasing due to the higher volume of injuries in the sport as a whole. The independent even mentions, “Medical evidence suggests that in terms of the risk of long-term brain injury, hockey is second only to American football.” Most of the attention towards head injury gets placed towards American football, however it is not the only sport with long term injuries like this. These injuries are not just a bellringer as commonly referred to in the sport however lifelong.

Hockey culture is one of the things that makes the sport very unique. It manages to celebrate both the skill and finesse of the game, but also the injury causing aggression and violence. On a team every player has their role, some are the soft handed quick skating finesse players, while others are the aggressive stereotypical masculine enforcers who bring physicality into the game. However, neither of these two groups are protected from injury, but it is far more likely for enforcers to reap the effects of this due to their physical prowess on the ice. Dr. Kale stated to ABC News, “athletes who experienced repetitive blows to the head during contact sports. Such hits led to severe medical problems, including short-term and long-term memory loss, chronic headaches, sleep disorders, mood

and behavioral problems, psychiatric changes and even early onset dementia.”

Enforcers are much more likely to get seriously hurt and experience these lifelong injuries even proving so in 2011, “Within the space of three months, three ‘enforcers’ were found dead, one from an accidental drug overdose, and two from apparent suicides. They were aged 27, 28 and 35 respectively. One, Rick Rypien, was a forward for the Canucks the previous season. Another, Derek Boogaard, suffered a season-ending concussion while playing for the New York Rangers.”

The Independent mentioned drawing a correlation between the aggressive style of play and the unfortunate death of the three mentioned players, while also potentially reaffirming the doctor’s claim among the likelihood of, “mood and behavioral problems.” What adds on to this is the narrative in hockey of get up and keep going, all of the athletes in the study mentioned, “ Although in pain and knowing that playing would make them feel worse, they nevertheless wanted and felt pressured to participate, especially during championships.” The study also mentions, “the acceptance of those risks and the willingness to subject the body to injury and pain in order to maintain a personal image of toughness are examples of conventional masculinity. Social norms of the sport are dominated by codes and practices that legitimize such masculinity.” Leading back to the stereotypical masculine enforcer who puts himself at a far higher risk for injury.

Many medical professionals believe that this fundamental part of the game is extremely dangerous and should be taken out of the game. They see it as the root cause for all of the concussions and injuries that are withstood among many players, and believe that the pros to removing checking far outweigh the cons. Dr. Rajendra Kale had also mentioned to ABC News, ““When you find any tradition is causing damage to human's brain, it's time to change traditions, we found traditions that are harmful and we need to give them up.” The neurologist takes the common stance among his colleagues as he believes it is putting players at risk. The long term effects of these injuries are made very clear as well the Swedish study mentions, “Participants reported that tinnitus, vertigo and increased sensitivity to light, voices and scents made it difficult for them to remain in places with several people at the same time and described avoiding activities and situations that would trigger headaches, as well as using headphones or drinking beer to reduce the effects of babble in crowded places. In those situations, some described almost panicking because they could not determine who said what. In general, the participants expressed frustration with sustaining injuries that influenced their daily lives so considerably.” Showing how many of these injuries do have very dangerous long term effects and can be harmful to even everyday life for many of these players.

However, many players believe the contrary to this, and have a love for the fast paced intensity of the game and that is something that most do not want taken away from the game. One of the focal points of this issue is Sidney Crosby. The independent refers to him as, “common consent the league's finest player - and beyond all doubt Canada's biggest sporting star” who suffered a massive concussion which kept him off the ice for 10 months<sup>1</sup>. Worldwide this drew massive attention to the issue at hand about concussions in hockey, and mostly those as a result of checking. The issue is contested among players of the game, one thing that remains constant and unanimous is the need for respect towards one and other, and proper technique. Sidney Crosby told the independent, “Whether it's accidental or not accidental, you have to be responsible out there.” He holds a common stance that many professionals take towards the scenario. The Swedish study even cited, “Above all, participants emphasized the importance of respecting other players and proposed eliminating every aspect of disrespect and violence in ice hockey.” A study in which one of the observers was former NHL player Henrik Zetterberg, and took the stories of 9 professional players (8 male 1 Female) who had to end their career short due to experiencing multiple concussions. Also mentioned in the study is the emphasis on technique and the proper way to check another player. One of the participants in the study had said, “Coaches and leaders

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<sup>1</sup> ABC News

of younger players [...] should teach early on how to both give and receive tackles, because it's a matter of respect toward other players. I find it very difficult to believe that a player would hurt someone deliberately. [...] So, keeping your elbows down and understanding when and how you can tackle to not hurt anyone or damage anything is important.”

### Citations

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