

# coping with concussions

High school sports are a cherished part of American society, but they can have serious mental health repercussions if the proper precautions are not taken.

Earlier this season, after repeated helmet-to-helmet contact at football practice, junior Jake Todd knew something wasn't right.

"It hurt so bad," he said. "It felt like there was a knife sticking into my brain."

Todd had suffered a concussion.

"For the next couple of days, I couldn't focus on anything, and my head was killing me. Even the lights in classrooms were giving me headaches," Todd said.

Todd's circumstance is not a n

unusual one. The severity of concussions in high school sports has often passed under the radar of officials, parents and coaches. But in light of recent studies being conducted on concussions, and the increasing number of concussions suffered annually, the issue has finally received the attention it is due.

"Players won't usually tell us that they think they've had a concussion, especially varsity players, because they don't want to have to sit out," said Dr. Daniel Schmoll, a family physician at Shawnee Mission Medical Center. "We usually look for dizziness, nausea, memory loss, some of the key symptoms. We ask other players if they saw the individual pass out briefly or do anything unusual."

Schmoll also said that players often don't realize the potential danger that is inherent with concussions. In North Carolina last year, two high school football players died from concussion-related symptoms. Each had returned to play within two days of being concussed. Fourteen high school football players died in

2008, according to the Annual Survey of Football Injury Research.

"You know, I would like to think that in my years of coaching, there are always two things I don't mess around with: lightning and concussions," varsity football coach Aaron Barnett said. "Head trauma, I think, is something where there can be some long-lasting effects."

A study from the Center for Injury Research and Policy at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio, reported that 40.5 percent of high school players who suffer a concussion return to play prematurely, setting themselves up for serious health related repercussions later in life, namely depression, memory loss and early-developing dementia.

"The thing that kind of puts us coaches in a bind is a concussion isn't something you can't just X-ray or look at. You have to rely on the player telling you about it," Barnett said. "And what makes it tough is the fact that some kids may have a concussion and never say a word."

In the event of a possibly concussed player, trainer Kodi Bauer is often the first on the scene.

"The first thing I ask them is if they have a headache, if they are dizzy, have blurry vision, ringing in the ears or any other symptoms. After those questions, I ask more cognitive questions like if they know where they are or what the score is," Bauer said.

The problem is that players can deny most of these minor symptoms, such as headache or dizziness. A report published by USNews.com indicated that only about 42 percent of high schools in the country have trainers, so even severe cases can



Senior Chris Mansker is tackled from the front and back by two Lawrence High defenders on Sept. 18.