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## Concussions Drawing Increased Scrutiny

By [Les Carpenter](#)

LOS ANGELES -- The night of the Dallas Cowboys' second consecutive NFC championship in January 1994, Troy Aikman was in a hospital unable to remember what, if anything, he and his teammates had accomplished hours earlier.

A third-quarter hit had knocked the quarterback's brain against the sides of his skull. At a concussion seminar this past Friday morning, Aikman's agent Leigh Steinberg recalled visiting him in the hospital that night and being met with blank stares.

Steinberg remembered Aikman asking, "Did I play a football game today?"

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When Steinberg said yes, Aikman then asked if he played well. Steinberg again said yes. Aikman then wondered if the Cowboys had won. When told yes again, Aikman asked what the win meant. Steinberg told him he was going to the Super Bowl.

"His face really brightened then," Steinberg recalled.

Five minutes later, Aikman turned to Steinberg and said, "Did I play a football game today?"

Steinberg told this story at the seminar he put on along with the Los Angeles-based Sports Concussion Institute to illustrate a fact that now seems startling. After a week of fogginess and feeling sick to his stomach, Aikman played in the Super Bowl, exposing himself to a potential blow that could have caused further head trauma and put him at risk for future debilitating problems.

Several years ago, Steinberg organized a seminar to study concussions, but the subject quickly died. Now interest has regenerated after recent suggestions that the deaths of former NFL players Mike Webster, Andre Waters and Terry Long might have been related to concussions. Friday's seminar drew several doctors who are considered leaders in the field and who presented new findings that appear to show just how blows to a brain not healed from a previous concussion can cause exponentially more damage.

Mark Lovell, the director of the Sports Medicine Concussion Program at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, said estimates from the Centers for Disease Control show there are 1.6 million to 3.8 million sports concussions a year. Other studies of high school athletes suggest 70 percent of football players reported concussion symptoms but only 20 percent knew they had a concussion. It takes two weeks for 60 percent of high school athletes to recovery fully from a concussion, he said.

Several of the doctors worried that too many of those kids are returning to action sooner than that, which leaves the brain vulnerable to another hit that could give the athlete headaches, dizziness and temporary amnesia for weeks and put him or her at a heightened risk for conditions such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases.

The problem is no one knows just how extensive those risks are.

"This is the last frontier in medical research," Steinberg said. "We know everything about the knees and joints. But the brain is truly the last frontier."



Former Dallas quarterback Troy Aikman didn't remember playing in the 1994 NFC championship game because of a blow to his head in the third quarter. (By Jonathan Newton -- The Washington Post)

## NFL DRAFT



Can't-miss prospect [Calvin Johnson](#) leads a strong group of wide receivers in the 2007 NFL draft class.

Despite the fact there are more [busts than successes](#), teams continue to draft QBs with top choices.

The Raiders face a tough choice with the [No. 1 overall pick](#) in this year's draft.

The league's new [conduct policy](#) is affecting how teams look at the draft. Hampton University has a chance to send [six players](#) into the NFL next

year, unheard of for a Division I-AA school.

## BASICS

**When:** April 28-29

**Where:** New York

**When:** NFL Network (Rounds 1-3, 11 a.m.-11 p.m. April 28; Rounds 4-7, noon-7 p.m. April 29), ESPN (noon-8 p.m. April 28; 11 a.m.-6 p.m. April 29).

## POSITIONAL BREAKDOWN



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The Post's **Mark Maske** on all things NFL -- only on washingtonpost.com.

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