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02/15/2017 07:22:22 AM

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The question of whether head injuries sustained in contact sports like rugby and football could cause long-term brain damage has long-troubled scientists. Now, for the first time, a study has found a possible link. We're now joined by one of the scientists who carried out the research, Professor John Hardy and by Dawn Astle, daughter of former England striker Jeff Astle, who died from a degenerative brain disease in 2002, which an inquest found was associated with heading the old-style, heavy leather

footballs. Good morning and thanks we much for joining us. I know you've been talking about this for many years. We will get some information on the research, but what do you make of it? Are you pleased to hear that this type of research is being done? Yes, of course we are pleased. My overriding reaction is that I'm really not surprised by the findings. As you say, this disease was found in dad's rain two years ago and we knew that at the time he was the first reduce football to have died of the disease but we knew he wouldn't be the first or the last. -- first British football. There are a lot of headlines in the papers this morning. People will wake up to headlines like, heading a football can lead to dementia. Evil are linking that the children paying football as well. We need to get to the bottom of what the research has

found. -- people are linking. A psychiatrist from Swansea followed 14 national football is who got dementia and he obtained autopsy permission for six of them. Of those six who all had dementia, four of them had evidence of what we -- of the syndrome that boxers get. So four of the six had evidence of a syndrome that is caused by repeated injury. And you don't know at this stage exactly what was causing the injury, because it could have been heading the ball or collisions? Do we know? That's right. It could have been heading the ball, it could have been head to head collisions and so on. You are absolutely right. We don't know exactly. We've only got their playing career history. That's all. I think only one of them had

evidence that at one time he had a concussion, so we have very little medical information about the events during their careers. In your dad's on case, the coroner described the illness as an industrial disease. Obviously long years of heading a rather heavy leather foot wall, -- football, spending time with your dad over the years, did he ever consider what he was doing was causing damage? I don't think so. For more the families I've spoken to, I don't think people do. But I know dad used to say, especially when the ball was wet, he used to say it was like heading a bag of bricks. When I speak to a lot of experts now they say the modern-day ball... Best know evidence of it being any safer. If we could just pick up that point. The numbers,

what they've looked at, is it easy at this point the extrapolates on this? Have only looked at six people. It would be great to have more systematic data, on more professional footballers for sure. It would be great to have more data and I know the professional footballers associations and the FA are now looking at following systematically ex- foot wall -- ex- footballers to see what happens to them. You are right, six is rather few, so we really need to get more data, that's for sure. If there is conclusive proof that this is a problem, and we are some way short of this now, to do what they've done in America where kids under the age of ten allowed to head a foot -- football, how far should things go? One of my fondest memories as a kid

is scoring a goal, heading a goal, when I was 13 on a playing field. You know, of course I was a terrible player and they only played occasionally and I think that sort of thing is great for kids. We don't want to bring up a nation of couch potatoes. I do think that we should not encourage repetitive practising of heading, for example, but I think we have to measure the benefits of sport against the possible downsides and systematic data is important. I should be clear that our data is on players who have paid for 25 years and probably played every day for several hours. So it is very different from looking at children who played the occasional game at school. There has been a lot of work

done in football and other sports around concussion. Are there things you would like to see changed? Well, if I can just go back to kids playing football, we all know the benefits of sport participation. We all know that. But it should never be seen as an acceptable consequence, rain damage. It should be never seen as that. -- brain damage. There needs to be more research. The thing that frustrates me and makes me upset and angry is 15 years on since my dad died the coroner's ruling was clear, it was a landmark ruling at the time, when the coroner ruled that paying football is what killed him. We've been asking for a long time as to whether we have a problem with our former players and dementia and it is really sad and not forgiveable that 15 years on we are no further forward. Really appreciate your

insight and honesty this morning. If you've got something you would like to say about that, please get in contact. It is fascinating. You can talk about it on Facebook and you can tweet us as well.