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02/15/2017 10:30:03 AM

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 For the first time, a scientific study has found a possible link between head injuries and brain damage in former footballers. Researchers studied the brains of six former players who had died from dementia, and discovered that some of them had a form of the disease linked to repeated blows to the head. We can speak to former footballers Ian St John, Kevin Davies, Gordon Smith and child's football coach Nathan Sargeson.

joining us. Ian, I wanted to come to you first. You played for Liverpool from 1961 to 1971 and a large number of your former team-mates have got dementia, haven't they? Just tell us what you have seen. Well, I mean, we're talking about that age group that played at that time. Of my team-mates, six of them, six in a group of at that time, there wasn't big squads of players. I would say in a group of maybe 16 players you've got six of them that has got Alzheimer's. So, it is quite, you know, a large percentage I think. Yes, I mean the research today does not give a sort of definitive answer as to whether football would be the cause of that. It is a limited study, but from your experience anecdotally, the knock to the head

that you would have taken playing and heading the old-fashioned leather footballs, what are your thoughts? Well, for people of my vintage, I would say, you know, all of the facts that we have got stand up. I don't know why the FA and the PFA have covered this up for years. I mean I talked about it to the PFA a couple of years ago and their answer was, "Well, women get Alzheimer's so therefore, it's not an industrial injury." With a football." It is a load of nonsense. I do think the studies that are being done now will prove the point that the heading the ball, that heavy ball, in our era, I don't know about today's light ball, in our era heading that heavy ball day in and day out, it is not the matches, it is training as well, so you're banging the heavy balls and the lads now, at this stage of their lives

are either dying or have dementia. I want to bring in Kevin, you are a former player. Are you surprised about what the research is indicating potentially on there being a link between heading the ball and dementia? Good morning. I wouldn't say I'm surprised. When you start to look at the numbers in terms of professional players, the amount of contact they have with the ball, if you look at my career for instance, over 800 career games and you take into training and all the training methods and things, the numbers start to stack up, it could be between 10,000 and 50,000 times that you're heading the ball and listening to Ian, they are different. The ball has changed a lot. The training methods have changed a lot now. You see some sessions where you were hurling balls to the deaders and pinging the ball at pace for them to head the balls. It was scary at the time. That has changed and the style of football has changed a lot. But there needs to be more research and

more evidence with the new footballs, they are lighter compared to back in the 50s and 60s. When you say it was scary at the time. Did you ever feel any effects of it? No, not particularly. I'm well renowned for heading the ball and we used to get the stats back, it can be between 45 and 20 times. The one that concerns me most is from the goalkeepers, ball if hand and the centre-back is coming to head the ball. You're challenging for the ball and there is the concussions, we saw Gary Cahill and Ryan Mason clashing heads and they could have long-term effects further down the line, but playing con tableg sport, there will be a ricks. We know that as sports machine and they are the risks we're prepared to take, I think. Do you think it is the job though of the gof rning bodies to

look properly and maybe think about changes if there is a look properly and maybe think about changes if there is a link? they examine six brains, and in four cases, they are looking for the CD which they only can when someone is deceased. There is definitely better science available now, MRI scans, but to do more research into this will take another 15-20 years, I believe, if they start now. I think the PFA have got an expert concussion panel in place and are speaking to the FA and it is trying to divide the right methods and find a way of getting the right research done and how they will monitor that over a person's career. It needs to be done, and if there is a problem, it needs to be something we look into in terms of protecting young children. As a father myself, I don't see a lot of heading with young children and I know they banned it in the United States for under 11th. Having watched grassroots football for a number of

years, I don't see a lot of children heading balls so it is not a bit -- major concern for me now. Nathan, you coach children playing football. What is your view of kids heading the ball? Just to reiterate some of Ian and Kevin's points, really, you know, the latest footballs that are used have come a long way since Ian's days and the technology around the ball, where it is more synthetic leather than a solid casing. But as Kevin said, in grassroots football, you don't see a lot of kids heading the ball and really, it is how much is done at training, obviously, you have to limit the amount and think about it. And obviously, with the findings and the studies, you have to take it into account. When you say you don't see a lot of kids heading the ball, if it actively discouraged? Oh, it is just because

of the physicality of the children. -- no, it is just. Especially at the other end, they aren't going to kick it 20 feet into the sky for it to come down and other kids to be encouraged to head the ball. It is more round the fact it is never really off the floor. Gordon Smith, a former Scotland international and former chief executive of the SFA. Have the football associations, the professional bodies, been active enough on this? Not as yet but they are looking at it now. Certainly, going back to the fact I'm Ambassador of the Scottish youth football Association and they are looking at it because they understand what has happened in America regarding the ban on children heading the ball from 11 downwards. I agree with what Kevin and Nathan have both said, I see football at the younger level and

because now the game has changed because it is seven aside until the kids are 12, the ball is very rarely in the air so the kids don't head the ball as much now as they used to, no doubt about that. The second aspect of it is the fact that the balls are different from Ian's day, coming into the game at first, the balls have improved a lot, they were very heavily and a lot of the damage was done because of those kinds of balls and people doing a lot of heading practice, no doubt about it. A recent study was done which had a few kids, a few young players, heading the ball 20 times each and then they did a test on them and they found that their memory had deteriorated over a 24-hour period after heading 20 balls. It shows you that there is still damage being done from heading able and an effect from doing it. -- a ball. Certainly, we need to stop and make sure the kids don't do it while their brains

are developing and then maybe at an older age, we need to consider the fact it is as little as possible in training. So when you say make sure the kids don't do it, as in something as specific as the ban in the US? Yes, I think it will come in here. I think it will come to this country too. I would say from 12 years and other accommodation have no heading the ball at all. The -- 12 years and under, they should have no heading the ball. These concerns have been around a long time but this is the best research of its kind that has been done. Have the professional footballing bodies been remiss in not taking this issue seriously previously, and commissioning research? They have been, there should have been something on it. You can imagine some time in the future, there might be a scenario where each player has do sign a disclaimer to say that

they know they are taking a risk and regardless of what happens to them in the future regarding brainpower, maybe getting Alzheimer's, that they sign a disclaimer to say that if they are playing football, they are taking a risk and therefore they will not sue the clubs because that is the biggest threat, that is why they are looking at it, they have introduced it in that part of the world in terms of doing something but a lot of people in this country, there should have been some kind of compensation for the relatives affected. What is your view on that, Ian? The issue of compensation for people playing from your era? That is actually the big point about the whole thing. The FA and the PFA are just hiding behind, you know, whatever facts they have got. They don't want to be paying out for what would be classed as an industrial injury. You know, I went to the PFA a couple of years ago on the same topic, two years ago and said,"

friends of mine from Liverpool, they all seem to be getting dementia". They went, "OK, leave it with us", and they came back and said, "It has nothing to do with football because women get dementia". Of course they do but football and the footballs we headed for years caused this and they are denying it. They are in denial about it. Sorry to interrupt but you headed the ball, presumably. I did. Have you had any concerns yourself? I don't know how it works, why lads who headed the ball like I did, and I get a bit forgetful but I don't have the big problem. This is another thing, when they are doing all of these surveys, why don't they do one about goalkeepers? How many goalkeepers have got dementia over the years? Professional ones. If they did a survey, it would be interesting if there were none, which means that the goalkeeper, the

only guy on the field who is not really heading the ball, who is eight -- is OK. It is the outfield players who get it. Should there be a ban on children under 12 heading the ball? I'm worried about that because my grandchildren play football and they are in that age group. I would say, they are changing the way the game is played at that level, no kicking the ball over head height and so on so you don't have too high it, keep it on the carpet and pass around. That's fine. It is a form of football but heading the ball as a whiz been a big part of football. Thank you for joining us. Let us know your thoughts on this as joining us. Let us know your thoughts on this as usual.