**[THE TIMES SPORT](http://www.theaustralian.com.au/sport/the-times-sport)**

**Footballers at an elevated risk of dementia**

* OLIVER MOODY
* The Times
* 12:00AM February 16, 2017
* [**Save**](http://www.theaustralian.com.au/sport/the-times-sport/footballers-at-an-elevated-risk-of-dementia/news-story/841bd5d2027102348984a837f51848eb)

Professional footballers may be at an elevated risk of dementia because of the cumulative brain damage from headers, collisions and other knocks over decades of playing the game, according to the first study of its kind.

There have been many cases of prominent retired players developing Alzheimer’s disease, including three members of England’s 1966 World Cup-winning team.

In 2002, a coroner investigating the death of Jeff Astle, a ­former West Bromwich Albion striker, recorded that he had died of “industrial disease” after hearing that repeatedly heading heavy leather balls had caused trauma to his brain.

Beyond these anecdotal reports, however, there was little hard evidence of a link between dementia and football. Now a team of British researchers has found the first signs that seasoned footballers may pick up a type of progressive brain damage normally associated with former professional boxers.

The scientists carried out post-mortem examinations on the brains of six former players who had died in their 60s with dementia after an average of 26 years in the game.

Four of the brains showed the hallmarks of gradual percussive brain damage, which is known as chronic traumatic encephalopathy. This two-thirds proportion compares with one-in-eight in the ­general population.

Although definitive large-scale studies into the link between football and dementia still need to be carried out, the Football Association has met the authors of the study and said that it was taking the findings seriously.

The FA’s head of medicine, Charlotte Cowie, said that the association had already begun funding another project looking at whether retired players were at greater risk of various brain diseases than the population at large.

The six retired footballers’ brains were analysed by researchers at University College London. The CTE in the footballers’ brains tended to be much more aggravated than normal.

The findings are published in the journal *Acta Neuropathologica*.