

## Still Looking for Answers



Paul LaFollette, Editor

Much of this issue of the *Faculty Herald* is related to the proposed Multipurpose Facility (Stadium). I have written several editorials explaining my objection to this project beginning with Volume 46, academic year 2015-2016. In the intervening years, none of the issues that I have raised has been adequately addressed by the administration. Neither have the concerns of many of our neighbors. Neither have the concerns raised about the failure of such projects at various similar universities. Rather than writing even more words about the proposed Stadium, I am including some excerpts from what I have already written. I see no way to continue these discussions until the President provides substantive responses to these concerns—responses more compelling than “we are going to spend money anyway and this is the best way to spend it,” or “because many sports may involve concussions, there is no point in discussing the ethical issues of creating a new facility that glorifies football.” I would suggest that a good-faith starting point would be to make public the findings of the feasibility study that Temple paid for.

[From Volume 46, No. 3:](#)

Neuro-pathologist Ann McKee, a respected expert in Alzheimer's disease and repetitive brain injury was asked in an interview with Susan Lampert Smith whether she believes that the current emphasis on concussions will prevent CTE, she responded,

No. Despite our emphasis on concussion and managing concussion, it's probably not concussions that are giving rise to this disease. In fact, all our studies indicate that the number of concussions does not correlate with the severity of the CTE. It's the amount of exposure, the number of years playing sports. We know football players get 1,000 to 1,500 sub-concussive hits per season, even in high school—that's tens of thousands of hits if they play 10 years. The sub-concussive injury, the asymptomatic injury, is probably very important in developing this disease. CTE has only been found in individuals who sustained repetitive, cumulative traumas.

This means that it is unlikely that our best attempts to protect our student football players are effective. We know too little about how many sub-concussive episodes are dangerous nor what other factors may pre-dispose a player to be more sensitive to those events.

In other words, we are effectively using our student athletes as experimental subjects, trying to apply protective strategies which may or not be effective. Do they give informed consent? Should not some sort of disinterested Institutional Review Board evaluate this process? Should not somebody be looking at the risk/benefit ratio? How can this be ethical?

For myself, I find this state of affairs deeply disturbing. Operating in ignorance, we are encouraging our student athletes to engage in what may be a game of encephalopathic roulette. We may be paying those on football scholarship to expose themselves to risks that I would not expose myself or my children to.

Before we engage in a discussion of whether we should build a stadium, Temple needs to have a serious discussion as to whether we dare enable our students to enter at all into this game of roulette. I suspect that neither our administration nor our board have any interest in pursuing such ethical questions, but we the faculty aspire to be scholars, and as scholars we must embrace the highest ethical standards. I would call upon the Faculty Senate to begin a discussion of these questions at its earliest convenience. For myself, at the very least I do not plan to attend any more football matches anywhere.

[From Volume 48 No. 1:](#)

It is always interesting, when returning to campus in the fall, to see what changes have been made over the summer. The most disappointing non-change was that we are still discussing the possibility of building a football stadium here in North Philadelphia.

This is an idea that should have been abandoned long since, and that for at least two reasons. First, the mere discussion of this project has damaged an already tenuous relationship with our neighbors. To actually build it would have terrible consequences for those who live near our campus. Our students already provide too much rowdy interference in residents' day to day existence. The increased traffic, parking problems, and exaggerated bad behavior that football engenders would only make this worse. Our neighbors deserve better from us.

Second, there is the matter of the game itself. Football is an intrinsically violent game. It has much more to do with that nasty new owl than with the scholarship and temperate discussion symbolized by the old one. Which is to say that it has never been a sport that fits well with the mission of an institution of higher learning.

Furthermore, we now know that it contributes, in at least some cases, to permanent brain damage. Worse still, we do not know how to protect against that damage. The latest studies indicate that much of the damage is done by sub-concussive collisions. We don't know how to quantify these, nor how to assess which are damaging and which are not. This means that, at the moment, we cannot even pretend to protect our athletes. [...]

I cannot justify being entertained by players, at least some of whom are, even as I watch, doing permanent damage to their brains. And we who are Temple University cannot justify this either. We who spend our lives teaching students to use their brains well and wisely have no business supporting this “sport” that destroys its athletes in slow motion.

[From Volume 48, No. 2:](#)

I would like to propose three endeavors in which Temple could, if it had the courage, provide real leadership to American higher education.

The first of these I have written about before. It is time for us, all of us, at all levels, to put football behind us. Current research continues to show that football (along with other contact sports) causes irreparable brain damage which we do not know how to prevent. We now know that it is not sufficient to detect and respond to concussive events, because the damage is caused by undetectable sub-concussive events. As long as we can in no way prevent this damage, it is unconscionable to support and encourage this activity which provides no real benefit beyond entertainment. It is time for some forward-looking institution to lead the charge to change the culture to one which regards football as the unthinkable pastime that it is. I would be proud if that institution were Temple.