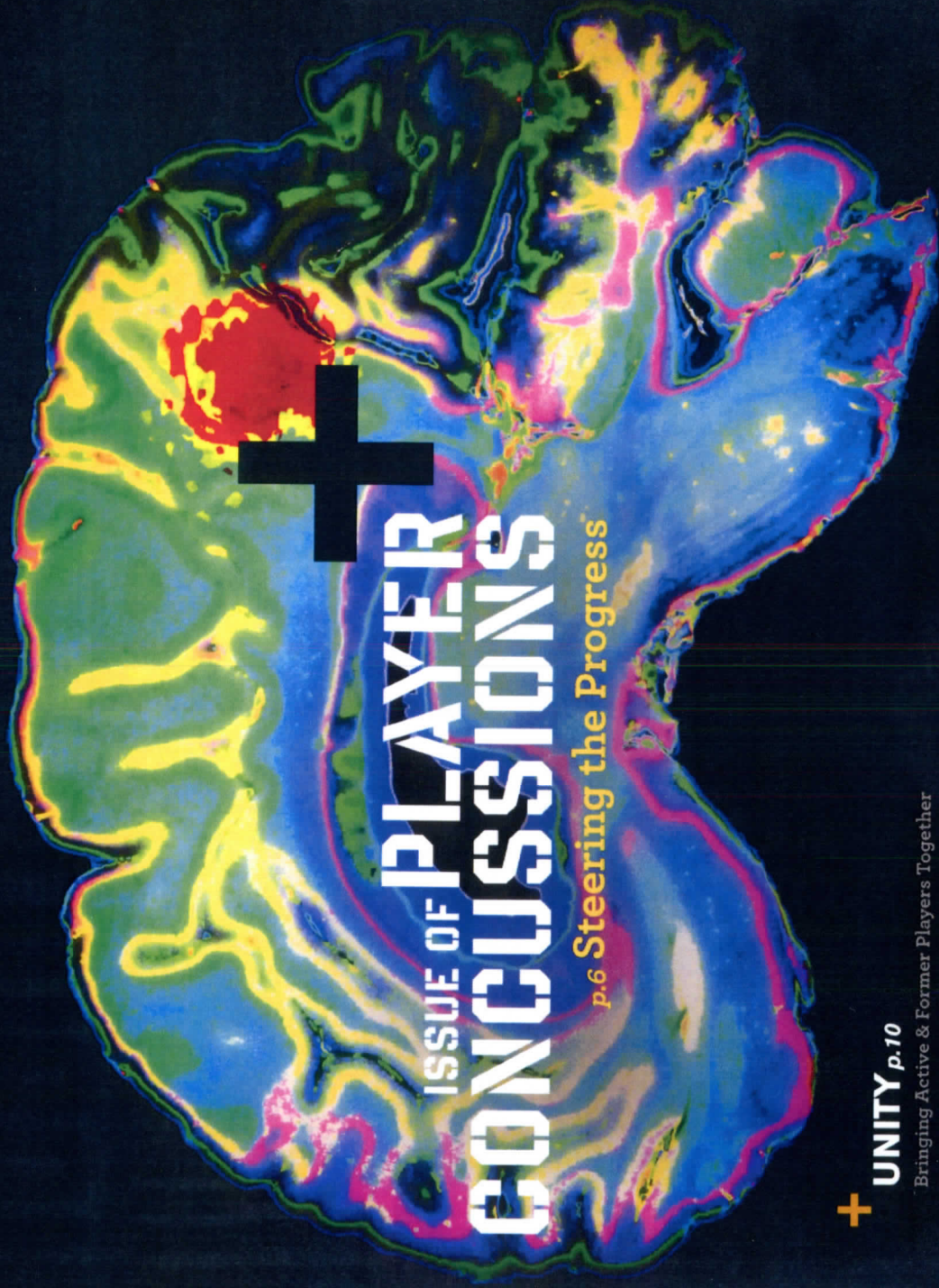


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ISSUE OF PLAYER CONCUSSIONS

by Khalil Garriott **Steering the Progress**

Ensuring player health and safety is of paramount importance for the NFL Players Association. Working to minimize player concussions, the NFLPA will continue to be influential in that critical aspect of health and safety.

Behind the leadership of Dr. Thom Mayer, the NFLPA's Medical Director, and Executive Committee member **Sean Morey**, the players' union has positioned itself at the forefront of the issue. People around the NFL may be split on the varying degrees of risk associated with concussions, but the NFLPA has taken a firm stance.

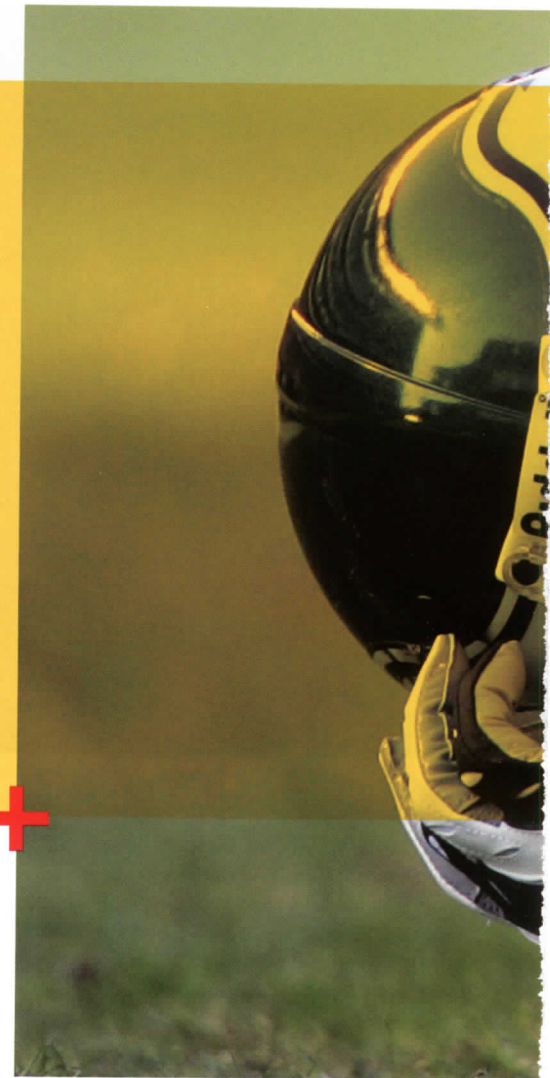
"There has been excellent work to this point," Mayer told USA Today. "The mission is to get players back to playing under the appropriate circumstances when they do suffer concussions."

By showing a commitment to keeping players' health the top priority when dealing with concussions, the NFL Players Association is looking out for their well-being far beyond their playing days. The union has helped reinforce the notion that when a player is concussed, the issue takes on a level of importance far greater than just football.

The concern received much greater attention last season, when such big-name players as quarterbacks **Ben Roethlisberger** and **Kurt Warner** and running backs **Clinton Portis** and **Brian Westbrook** suffered concussions. Many players have admitted that it's second-nature for them to not fully disclose their symptoms with doctors, but the NFLPA has urged all players to be completely forthright with medical staff. If they don't, experts say, players put themselves at higher risk for an injury that can affect their quality of life years down the road.

Mayer and the NFL Players Association want uniform, standardized evaluations [based on the highest medical standards] for any player who has suffered a concussion.

"It shouldn't matter if you play for the Bears or the Cardinals or the Redskins," Mayer said. "The evaluation should be the same."

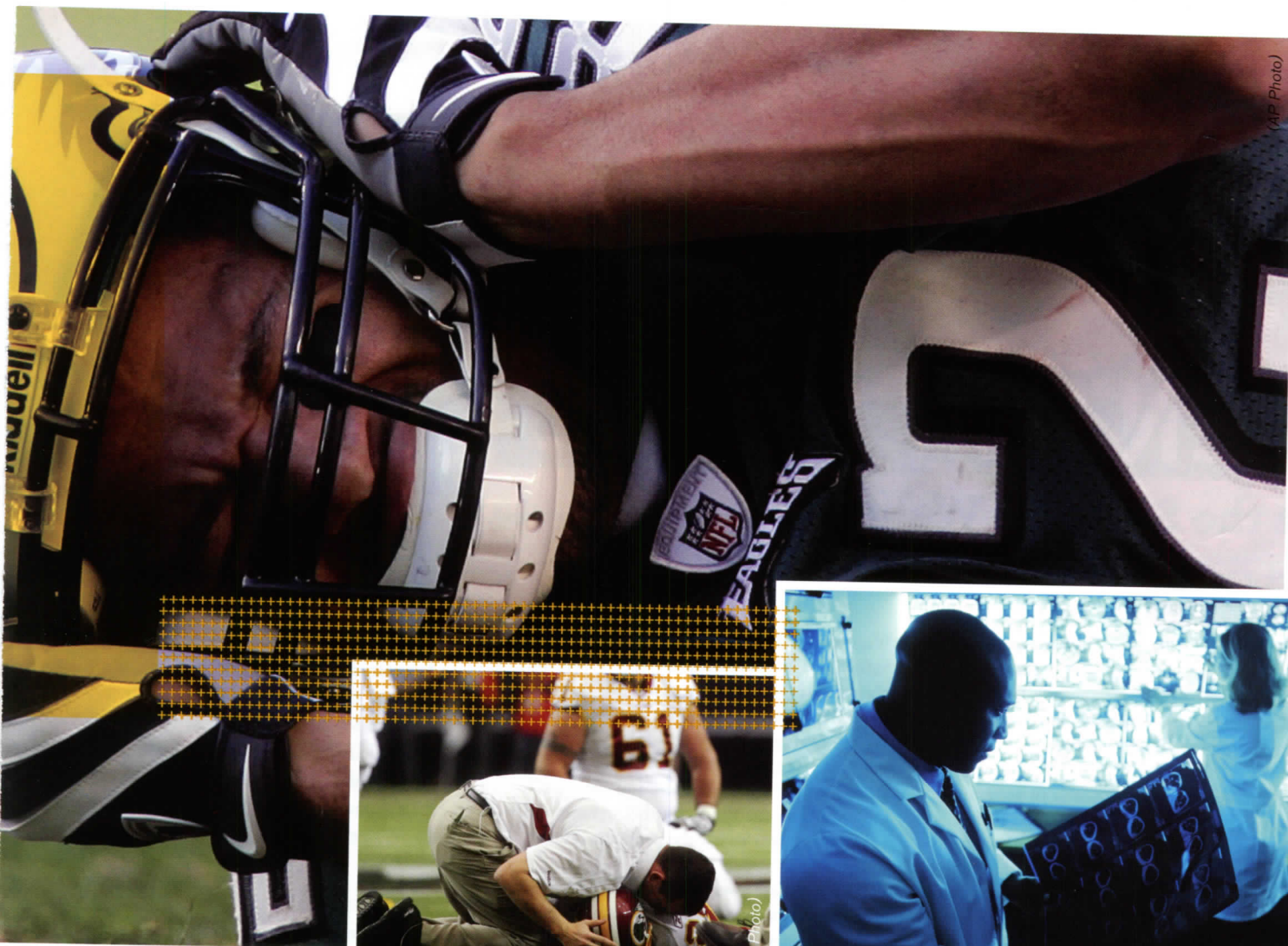


Philadelphia Eagles tight end L.J. Smith lies on the field after a hit in 2008 which caused a concussion. Smith's teammate Brian Westbrook absorbed two concussions in the span of three weeks in 2009.

Morey, a locker-room leader as co-alternate player representative for the Cardinals, became co-chair of the NFLPA's concussion and traumatic brain injury committee when it formed Oct. 2. It is a cause Morey takes seriously. The Ivy League-educated Pro Bowler has said he will donate his brain to science after his death, doing his part to advance study on the affect of repeated brain trauma.

"We need to continue to impress upon [the players] the importance of recognizing their injuries," said NFLPA Executive Director DeMaurice Smith. "But we must also try to understand what motivates that fear."

"I think the awareness level has definitely heightened because of it, and the teams are taking better precautions," Cleveland Browns linebacker **David Bowens** said. "There are a lot of steps being taken."



Washington Redskins running back Clinton Portis said he was in no rush to return to the field after suffering a concussion.

+ By raising awareness and prompting discussions about the significance of head injuries, players and their union have elevated the issue to a high level.

The union has made it a priority to discuss the lingering, long-term effects of head injuries to players on all 32 teams. By forming its own committee to address the issue and pushing the league to revamp its concussion committee, the union is taking the initiative to prolong the length of players' careers.

Players recognize that they are role models for millions of youth across the world. The union believes that implementing these changes means the example will trickle down to all levels of football.

According to the NFL, approximately 175 concussions occur each season, including preseason and postseason. However, given

the team-first mentality that many players have [not fully disclosing their symptoms because of a desire to help their team win] that figure likely is higher.

"It was growing in a sense that we needed a clearer-cut mandate independent of the league," said Mayer, a clinical professor of emergency medicine at George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

Knowing that concussions affect not only the player involved, but also his family, the NFLPA wants all players to report head injuries and their effects to doctors. By positioning itself on the front lines of the issue, the union has made considerable progress in addressing the

prevention and understanding of concussions in the NFL.

"There is been a resistance on behalf of the NFL to embrace a number of medical studies over the last few years," Smith said. "It is the primary reason we formed our own traumatic brain injury committee. We don't have to rely on the people who employ our players to do everything."

