

## The Lystedt Law: A Concussion Survivor's Journey



Zackery Lystedt

Although most people with a concussion fully recover, for some the effects of this injury can last weeks, months or longer. Concussions, a type of traumatic brain injury, are all serious. That is why the choices we make immediately following a concussion can decide life or death or whether an injured athlete will see a full recovery and return to play. The state of Washington stepped in to help make this choice clearer for coaches, parents and athletes.

In May 2009, the state of Washington passed a new bill called the Lystedt Law, which protects young athletes from the life threatening or potentially life-long consequences that returning to the game too soon can cause. The law, named after Zackery Lystedt, a young athlete who was permanently disabled after sustaining a concussion in 2006, and prematurely returned to the game, requires any youth showing signs of a concussion to be examined and cleared by a licensed health care provider before being allowed to return to play.

Sometimes referred to as the shake-it-off law, Zack Lystedt's story emphasizes why "shaking it off" puts players at risk for serious injury. Zack, a gifted athlete who played both offense and defense on his junior high school football team, was injured at 13 when his head struck the ground after tackling an opponent. A video of the game shows Zack lying on the ground with his hands clutching both sides of his helmet. The official called a time out, and Zack was sidelined for just three plays before half-time. His father

recounts the moments following the injury, "Zack was not knocked out, but he did grab his head and rocked back-and-forth in pain." Despite the blow, Zack shook it off and by the start of the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter, he was back in the game. "He always wanted to be part of the play," his father recalls.

After a hard-played 2<sup>nd</sup> half, Zack collapsed on the field and was airlifted to [Harborview Medical Center](#) where he underwent emergency life-saving surgery to remove the left and right side of his skull to relieve the pressure from his injured and swelling brain. He experienced numerous strokes, seven days on a ventilator and three months in a coma before he awoke to his parents and a new reality. Prematurely returning to the game had resulted in the battle for Zack's young life, including four weeks in a nursing home, two months in a children's hospital for rehabilitation, nine months before he spoke his first word, 13 months before he moved a leg or an arm, and 20 months on a feeding tube. It would be nearly three years before Zack would stand, with assistance, on his own two feet, and Washington would pass the Lystedt Law to help protect other young athletes in their state.

*"There is no one tougher than my son. Sometimes players and parents wrongly believe that it shows strength and courage to play injured. Battling pain is glamorized. Zack couldn't swallow or hold his head up. Strength is seeing Zack stand up out of his wheelchair and learning to talk again."*

- Victor Lystedt, Zack's Dad.

Zack's recovery has been long, trying and miraculous by many accounts. He has again proven himself a fierce competitor. The CDC, the Brain Injury Association of Washington and the Seattle Seahawks launched [Washington Heads Up: Concussion in Sports](#), a campaign to highlight the effects of concussion and the importance of being evaluated by a medical professional to prevent serious brain injury.

Protect your young athlete. Learn about the symptoms of a concussion and why the brain needs to fully heal before your child returns to play.

*For more information and on-line resources to keep your child and community safe, visit [www.cdc.gov/Concussion](http://www.cdc.gov/Concussion).*