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Super Bowl health risks: Why spearing is a no-no

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January 26, 6:07 PM

by Vicki Rackner MD, Seattle Doctor- Patient Examiner



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Most fans tune into the Super Bowl in hopes of catching a good football game--and not a reality medical show. As the Steelers and the Cardinals dress for Sunday's game, they may see locker room posters with the reminder, "See what you hit." Spearing, or head-down contact poses a serious health threat.



(AP)

Each time a player uses his head or helmet to make first contact with another player, he risks paralysis from a cervical spine injury. It doesn't matter if you're carrying the ball, blocking or tackling. Spearing is risky business. Just ask Reggie Brown, who was paralyzed after an unintentional spear. Or Dennis Brown who was involved in a spear of his own teammate.

Spearing was banned in American football in 1976. The unique nature of the spearing penalty underscores the health risk. Most penalties protect one player from another; spearing penalties protect players from themselves. The threat of the spearing penalty neutralizes the player's temptation to give the team a competitive advantage with head-down contact.

More than half of catastrophic injuries in sports are cervical spine injuries. C-spine injuries have been reported in most contact sports as well as skiing, track and field, diving, surfing, power lifting and equestrian events. C-spine injuries may occur in one in ten football players, most commonly in linemen and defensive players. Injuries occur in all levels of play, from the high school to the professional level. Fortunately few of these injuries result in long-term damage.

Players and fans will keep their heads up for while is certain to be an exciting game.

Vicki Rackner MD Seattle Doctor- Patient Examiner



Vicki Rackner MD is an experienced patient advocate who helps you get the most out of your dollars through patient-centered care.

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November 21, 4:09 PM

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