

The logo for FRONTLINE, featuring the word "FRONTLINE" in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters on a red rectangular background.

WGBH
One Guest Street
Boston, MA
02135

617.300.3500
fax 617.300.1001

pbs.org/frontline



FRONTLINE INVESTIGATES THE NEW INTENSITY OF HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL AND IF ENOUGH IS BEING DONE TO KEEP KIDS SAFE

FRONTLINE Presents

Football High

Tuesday, April 12, 2011, at 9 P.M. ET on PBS

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#FootballHigh

Corporate sponsorships, nationally televised games, minute-by-minute coverage on sports websites—for players, parents and coaches, high school football has never been bigger. But is enough being done to ensure players' safety as the intensity of the sport grows? In *Football High*, airing Tuesday, April 12, 2011, at 9 P.M. ET on PBS (check local listings), FRONTLINE investigates the new face of high school football.

Football observers and sports journalists alike agree that on average, high school players' size, speed and strength have increased dramatically over the past five to 10 years—with some players weighing in at more than 300 pounds. "The ramping up of pressure on high school kids ... and the increase of media attention on high school football, my God, in the last 10 years, it's become like a little NFL," says Gregg Easterbrook, a writer and columnist for ESPN. "If you look at it position by position, you can only compare it to NFL teams," says trainer Kelvin Williams. "It's just crazy. They are huge."

FRONTLINE centers its investigation in Arkansas, where two players collapsed from heatstroke last year while practicing during one of the hottest summers on record. The players were placed in the same intensive care unit in Little Rock, both having suffered extensive damage to their internal organs. One boy survived, but the other

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boy died in the hospital three months after his collapse. “There should never, ever be a person [dying] from exertional heatstroke, because it’s 100 percent preventable,” says Dr. Doug Casa, a leading expert on heatstroke.

In the wake of the tragedy in Arkansas, FRONTLINE investigates the differences in the two boys’ fates. Only one of the boys’ teams had an athletic trainer on staff, which reflects the reality in most of Arkansas: Only 15 percent of the schools in the state have a certified medical professional at games and practices, slightly below the national average.

At a tiny private school in northwest Arkansas, *Football High* follows the Shiloh Christian Saints, detailing the team’s intense year-round training regimen. During the playing season, head injuries sustained by one Shiloh running back illuminate the dangers of the estimated 60,000 concussions suffered each year by high school football players.

In 2010, researchers discovered a degenerative mental disease in the brain of 21-year-old Owen Thomas, a University of Pennsylvania football player who committed suicide last year—and had never reported a concussion throughout his football career. Thomas’ brain showed evidence of CTE, or chronic traumatic encephalopathy, the same mental degenerative disease rampant in the brains of NFL players with serious mental problems. “It has totally changed what I thought about this game,” says researcher Dr. Ann McKee. “Anybody who’s playing the game, this could happen; this could be the result.”

Football High is a FRONTLINE production with Ark Media. The producers are Rachel Dretzin and Caitlin McNally. The writer and director is Rachel Dretzin. FRONTLINE is produced by WGBH Boston and is broadcast nationwide on PBS.

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Press contact:

Diane Buxton (617) 300-5375 diane_buxton@wgbh.org

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