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Looking the Other Way in the Coliseum

Ken Briggs | Jan. 18, 2013 NCR Today

When I find myself trying to fool myself by being fooled, it usually turns out that I'm ducking a piece of reality instead of facing it. If that's the case with Manti Te'o, college football fans regularly practice their (our) own version of it on a vastly larger scale in their blythe acceptance of the game's lethal consequences.

Simply put, the scientific studies show again and again that football can kill kids, maybe not right away, but in the not-so-longer run. Yet fans continue to show up in growing numbers to spur their own or others' offspring into harm's way. Rationalizations, justifications, evasions stamp out the doubts and evidence. Better equipment will take care of it (hasn't happened). Kids shouldn't be denied a chance to play a game they love (sword fighting could have qualified at one time). Not everyone suffers permanent brain damage (no, but nearly 2,000 ex-NFL players are filing suit against the league claiming they have -- and how big a risk is "acceptable"?).

Others repeat the mantra that football is too ingrained, too popular, too revenue producing to shut down. Probably, but that doesn't excuse fans from fooling themselves.

The great Junior Seau, who looked indesctructible, was severely mentally ill from his legion bangs on the head and took his own life. The medical report was released this past week. He is just the latest casualty.

Fan denial of the carnage and cost that goes with the game is immense and seemingly intractable. A few parents have become un-duped and refuse to permit their kids to play. You'd think Catholic institutions would raise ethical alarms based on the principle that every person's dignity mut be safe-guarded, but no such movement has shown itself. Too many worldly considerations keep the blinders on.

In the bigger picture, Manti Te'o's efforts to kid himself are small potatoes.

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