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Resolved: Football for young people violates Catholic principles of upholding human dignity and should be banned from Catholic high schools and colleges.

Let the debate begin.

AFFIRM: The church's most powerful lesson is to protect human life at all stages. Football ignores that lesson by exposing kids to lifelong disabilities, including brain damage. If you confine it to those under 21, the age widely seen as enabling free adult consent, then high school and most college students are unjustly thrown into danger without the capacity to decide. Catholics emphasize keeping people from harm. On that basis, football represents child abuse and the church turns a blind eye.

OPPOSE: Football has been around a long time and has made life better for lots of kids. Sports are part of growing up — learning fair play, developing skills and self-worth. Risk is part of life. Lots of kids don't get hurt and in later years even many of those who did sustain brain injuries say they'd do it all over again.

AFFIRM: The research about the extent of serious injury is still in progress, but the rash of reports of neurological disease that shows up years later foreshadows continuing bad news. The science is there and keeps providing more gruesome cases. Repeated hits to the head have caused early dementia, bodily dysfunction and head trauma, among other things. Compare it to other threats. Studies of alcoholism, for example, show it affects about 10 percent of users. Does that mean it's OK to let kids help themselves to alcohol on grounds that only one in 10 would die of the disease? Would handing out shotguns to any adolescent who wanted one be a good idea even though not everyone would kill or be killed?

OPPOSE: The Catholic Church can't protect its young people from everything, including rough play. There are always trade-offs and acceptable risks. Football builds character and teamwork. Students who otherwise couldn't afford college get athletic scholarships from the funds provided by football money. Those advantages have contributed untold strength to the good name of Catholicism.

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AFFIRM: I contend that Catholics, along with everyone else, tend to see in more complex terms, believing violent sports like football instill a mixture of good and bad

values. Team bonding and sacrifice are pluses; smash-mouth tactics and desires to destroy opponents don't sound much like Jesus. Neither does the lure of egotism.

OPPOSE: Everything comes with positive and negative points. It seems to me that giving a young man a deep-rooted loyalty to his fellow players and the value of cooperative goals pays enormous dividends.

AFFIRM: The evidence keeps piling up that recurring hits to the head causes severe brain injuries, often leading to death. Scientists recently studying 112 brains of deceased football players found 111 had suffered such damage. The results reinforced a growing stack of similar reports.

OPPOSE: But those brains were donated by survivors who believed the dead players had suffered life-threatening damage That assumes that the donors were a special category of people who had observed symptoms related to brain injury before death occurred. Therefore, the probability of finding brain disease was high to begin with. Meanwhile, most players who died and whose brains weren't studied in the same way may well have been free of concussion-related disease or lasting head trauma of any kind.

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AFFIRM: We don't yet know the fate of the majority, but researchers are working on it. Even if every player outside the donor group were tested and found to have no brain damage, the 110 would still constitute an estimated 9 percent or more of the total. It's reasonable to assume, of course, that many more would be found among the untested and the percentage would go up. In any event, how many is too many to consider stopping the cause of the injury? What would it take for Catholics and other people to give up a game they love and profit from to spare young people from hideous injury and death?

OPPOSE: These claims all depend on a group of so-called experts whose conclusions shouldn't be accepted at face value. It's a lot like the claims by those called experts that human activity largely causes climate change. Others deny that on the basis that it doesn't make sense to them or that science doesn't capture the whole picture. So as history has often shown, it's a mistake to draw hasty conclusions. Life is a risk. Kids and sports go together in such a way that collateral damage can considered acceptable.

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AFFIRM: It's one thing to be an independent-thinking adult who takes those risks; another to allow enthusiasm, pressure from peers and promises of scholarship rewards to leap off the precipice without clearly looking. Lifelong consequences can begin with the first concussion followed by hundreds of crashes that worsen damage over time

OPPOSE: Again, I'd argue for balance. Look at the overall good football has delivered. Money to fund other sports and school projects, college athletic grants, opportunities to show talents and recognition and huge stores of love of the game and its players by parents, schoolmates and the general public I'd be willing to take a few chances for those prize benefits It's a win-win proposition, especially as the injury problem gets fixed. Concussions are getting lots more attention, equipment improvements to helmets and padding and limitations on hitting in practice continue to improve safety.

Related: Football brain injuries could pierce football bubble

AFFIRM: So far, nothing has been shown to significantly reduce the dangers to young people whose brains have not yet fully developed. Rather than assuming the problem is being fixed and allowing that to justify going on until then, why not stop the game in Catholic high schools and colleges until or unless a solution has been demonstrated to work? Otherwise, how can it be considered anything but child abuse? Catholics have all the right ethics to handle this, but so far little to nothing has happened. How can that be? Why wouldn't concern for young men's long-term welfare warrant drastic remedies — on grounds similar to defending other endangered forms of life? Money and entertainment are powerful deterrents.

OPPOSE: Child abuse is obviously an extreme charge. To assume Catholics parents stand by without caring for the health and mental stability of their kids would be outrageous. Parents want children to stretch their wings and try doing what expands their horizons. Nobody wants their children to be harmed. Far from abusing the players, coaches lead them to be better than they've ever been and show their potential. Watching from the stands, I see young men who love to play and love to be around their teammates. There are always those whom the coaches have steered away from waywardness and aimlessness. The game has long proven its worth. There are potential downsides, but they are only potential so far as we

know. The young men suit up for the invigorating upsides.