

Speech and Award Presentation
Sports Safety Clinic of Safe Kids East Side, Washington State
August, 27, 2013

Thank you so much for inviting me to join you tonight. What a privilege to be speaking about sports safety alongside the real pioneers of the concussion safety movement.

Since Washington passed the first Return to Play law in 2009, 48 states have followed your lead and passed similar legislation. I don't believe there's ever been a tsunami of legislation in our nation's history, and maybe in the democratic world. It felt like the Lystedt legislation spread across the country faster than Marshawn Lynch can finish a bag of skittles.

And, folks, that's all I know about the Seattle Seahawks. Except that they beat Green Bay the other night. And who could've missed that.

But I know the change you have made through this legislation, and there are many people who deserve our thanks, but surely on the top of the list is Richard Adler. Thank you for your work.

Responding to your leadership, Safe Kids has taken a strong role in the area of sports safety, supported by our founding sponsor Johnson & Johnson. I want to talk tonight about what what's now and what's next.

This month Safe Kids Worldwide released our most recent Sports Safety research report, and it could be said that the title of the report was named after you all: it's called "Game Changers".

We found that each year, 1.35 million children are seen in emergency rooms for sports-related injuries.

That's one child every 25 seconds.

And that's a scary number. It tells us at Safe Kids that we have to do more to prevent sports injuries, much more.

All of the Lystedt laws are different in some ways: and the next phase of public policy involves several measures, some of which have been adopted by some jurisdictions, some not.

--The focus needs to be on all sports, not just football.

--It has to focus on boys and girls.

--We have to deal with the whole roster of injuries that send kids to ERs, ACLs, Tommy John arm injuries, the implications of overuse and hydration, and sudden cardiac arrest. Our

research found that knee injuries account for 1 in 10 sports-related injuries. We report that female athletes are up to eight times more likely to tear their ACL than male athletes.

--The laws should cover all youth sports, not just those connected with public schools.

--And we need to start young, because there's a significant number of injuries affecting kids in 4th grade and in middle school. For example, New Hampshire recently passed a bill that expanded its Lystedt coverage from grades 9 to 12 all the way to grade 4.

--The ones clearing a young athlete should be a medical professional trained in diagnosing a concussion.

--Just the same, we have to add these precautions to prevent sports, and we cannot make them a barrier to the kids of poor and working class families. We cannot go back to sports segregation.

One of the projects of Game Changers is a grant program to five Safe Kids coalitions which are working on the implementation of the laws in the strongest possible way. We are just in the middle of awarding those grants, but I can tell you one of them involves a law which applies to kids down to grade 4 and another which covers all kids sports, whether it's with a public school, a private one or a Pop Warner League.

We have a lot more work to do. And you're doing it. One of the things we preach in "Game Changers" is that we shouldn't wait for laws to tell us to make change. Many of the issues can be dealt with by school boards and principals, supported by parents, docs, children's hospitals, the elected leaders who sponsored the legislation and groups like Safe Kids and brain injury associations.

And another thing, as we say in "Game Changers," is that public policy is just part of the game, and maybe a small part.

Some of it is cultural change, some sensible conduct on the part of all the players, the kids, the coaches, the parents, the school officials.

For example, we've learned that recovery from concussions doesn't only occur on the field or on a court. Game change means that "return to think"--"return to learn," may be better because it rhymes--is just as much a part of recovery as the decision on when the athlete returns to play.

Game change means teaching our kids that bravery sometimes means sitting it out. And that if they hurt somewhere, they need to talk to someone.

Game change means supporting our coaches. We need to make their continuing education about sports injuries meaningful, include accountability, that it's easily available and not a cost to them. We have been working with the CDC on that.

Game change means that parents cannot be back-seat coaches, yelling at a coach to put their kids back in the game. Our coaches are our partners in the sports safety challenge. We have to support them.

Game change means resisting the pressure that comes from college admission competition. Both athletes and parents need to accept an injury, even if it might affect what college they get into. We want sports to last a lifetime.

The stakes are high and here's why. I want to tell you about another young athlete who I got the chance to meet recently working on "Game Changers." His name is Steve and he plays softball. He went to Neshaminy High School which is one county over in Pennsylvania from where I grew up. During a game, a ball was hit Steve's way and he ran to get under it. The shortstop was also going for it, and he collided into Steve, shattering his face.

Steve's face was a puzzle that the docs had to put back together. A concussion was discussed but overshadowed by the reconstruction to his face. "As Steve began to look like Steve," as his mom says it, Steve had a hard time focusing. He had to read pages of a book two or three times before he got it. Once a grade A student, he was now running behind.

One day, Steve attended what we used to call assemblies when I went to school. It was about concussions, including the symptoms of one. As the signs were recited, Steve started to check them off and a lightbulb lit up above his fuzzy brain. Dizzy sometimes, check. Trouble concentrating, check.

Afterwards, right away, he went to see the school nurse. That began Steve's road to recovery, which he met with courage. A whole posse of caregivers surrounded, better informed. Steve's now starting his first year at Penn State, main campus.

Would that assembly at Steve's school have been called but not for the work here in Washington state? Maybe not. Pennsylvania had not yet passed its Lystedt law. But Bucks County was already working on what their program would be. Would Steve's road to getting better have been as informed as it was but for the work of Dr. Stan Herring, and so many of you? I don't think so.

There are thousands of young linebackers, pitchers, soccer players and cheerleaders who are back to playing their sport because of the leadership in this room and the inspiration of a young

man named Zach Lystedt. He was transported to the Harborview trauma center by helicopter, where his long journey to recovery started.

And this is my call to action for all of us tonight. I want to put those helicopter pilots picking up kids with massive sports injuries out of business. No more helicopters on youth sports fields.

Talk about a game changer.

My main job here tonight is to present awards for heroism. The first award is for an organization which has started the movement we have talked about throughout this conference. There are few associations in the medical community in this nation which have accomplished so much for their patients, and people who could have been patients if not for their work. Can I ask Lorena Kaplan to come up to join me in this award that is made on behalf of Safe Kids Worldwide and Safe Kids Eastside?

This first ever Safe Kids Sports Safety Heroes Award goes to the Brain Injury Association of Washington State. Dr. Herring and Mr. Adler can I present this award to you. Though you and your colleagues concentrate on the brain, we present this award from our hearts.

Next, I am proud, next, to present this award to Victor and Mercedes Lystedt--so please join me at the podium. It's the second ever Safe Kids Sports Safety Heroes Award. Victor and Mercedes, what a journey you've taken. Dealing with Zach's injury was heroic in itself, but what truly demonstrates this family's strength and character is their commitment to educating athletes, coaches and families across the nation about the importance of sports safety.

Some people are starstruck by celebrity, but I am a self-confessed nerd, a policy geek. And more than JT or Jay-Z, I get goosebumps from people like Zack Lystedt who inspire the kind of change that Zack made happen. Let's call him ZT, the T for the last letter of his name. His journey began on the football field, and with courage and grit and determination he beat all the odds in overcoming what that last hit did. But the journey, Zack, is not over. As I said earlier, we have a lot more work to do to make sports safe, for you, Zack, for Steve, and for millions of kids around the country.

Mercedes, Victor and Zack, I am humbled to present you with the Safe Kids Sports Safety Hero award. Thank you, my friends.