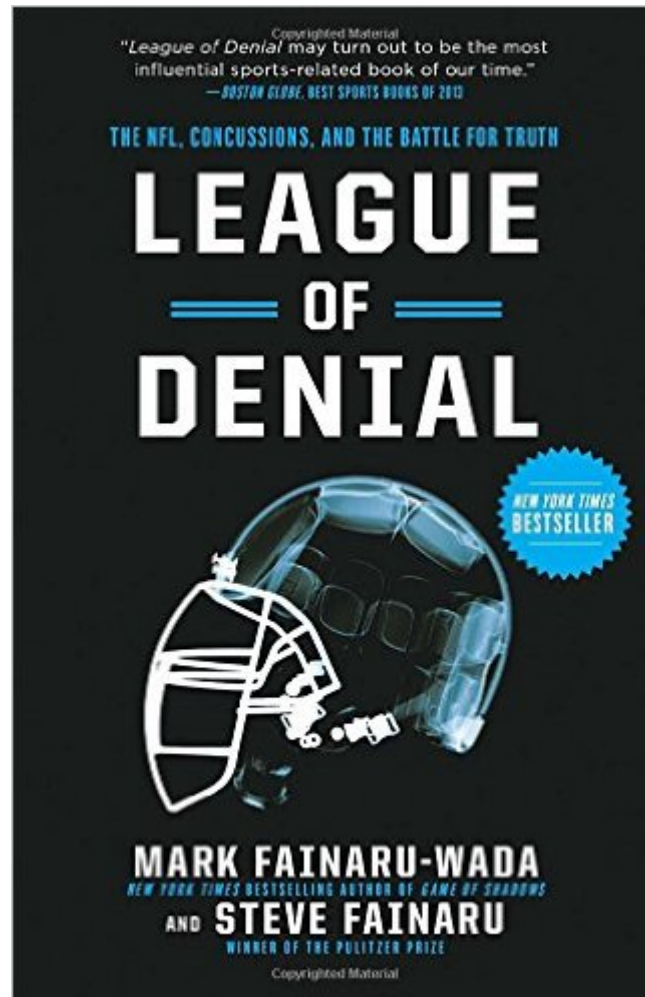


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League Of Denial: The NFL, Concussions, And The Battle For Truth



Synopsis

“PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL PLAYERS DO NOT SUSTAIN FREQUENT REPETITIVE BLOWS TO THE BRAIN ON A REGULAR BASIS.” So concluded the National Football League in a December 2005 scientific paper on concussions in America’s most popular sport. That judgment, implausible even to a casual fan, also contradicted the opinion of a growing cadre of neuroscientists who worked in vain to convince the NFL that it was facing a deadly new scourge: A chronic brain disease that was driving an alarming number of players -- including some of the all-time greats -- to madness. *League of Denial* reveals how the NFL, over a period of nearly two decades, sought to cover up and deny mounting evidence of the connection between football and brain damage. Comprehensively, and for the first time, award-winning ESPN investigative reporters Mark Fainaru-Wada and Steve Fainaru tell the story of a public health crisis that emerged from the playing fields of our 21st century pastime. Everyone knew that football is violent and dangerous. But what the players who built the NFL into a \$10 billion industry didn’t know -- and what the league sought to shield from them -- is that no amount of padding could protect the human brain from the force generated by modern football; that the very essence of the game could be exposing these players to brain damage. In a fast-paced narrative that moves between the NFL trenches, America’s research labs and the boardrooms where the NFL went to war against science, *League of Denial* examines how the league used its power and resources to attack independent scientists and elevate its own flawed research -- a campaign with echoes of Big Tobacco’s fight to deny the connection between smoking and lung cancer. It chronicles the tragic fates of players like Hall of Fame Pittsburgh Steelers center Mike Webster, who was so disturbed at the time of his death he fantasized about shooting NFL executives; and former Chargers great Junior Seau, whose diseased brain became the target of an unseemly scientific battle between researchers and the NFL. Based on exclusive interviews, previously undisclosed documents and private emails, this is the story of what the NFL knew and when it knew it -- questions at the heart of crisis that threatens football, from the highest levels all the way down to Pop Warner.

Book Information

Paperback: 432 pages

Publisher: Three Rivers Press; 1 edition (August 26, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0770437567

ISBN-13: 978-0770437565

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.9 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 12 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars Â Â See all reviews Â (279 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #70,650 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #33 in Â Books > Sports & Outdoors
> Miscellaneous > Sociology of Sports #48 in Â Books > Medical Books > Medicine > Sports
Medicine #149 in Â Books > Sports & Outdoors > Football (American)

Customer Reviews

First, I will note that I myself had a concussion when I was 7 after I fell off my bicycle and fractured my skull. I was "out" for four hours and don't recall anything of the hour before the accident. It is part of the reason that I am very interested in the research. As an avid NFL fan since the late 70s, I found this book difficult to read. The stories of what many players have had to endure after they retired is heartbreaking. The first time that I recall concussions being discussed in the media were in the time of Al Toon's retirement at the age of 29 after he said he had 9 concussions. I vaguely remember it being said then that there was a belief that having had one made a person predisposed to another and also there was a theory that some players are more prone to them, like Toon. In reading this book, it carefully lays out what was known about concussions by whom and when. And the startling thing is that a lot of what we take for granted, still wasn't considered hard science even 20 years ago. In 1990, a team doctor wanted to keep Bubby Brister out of a game and the Steelers Coach Chuck Noll wanted to know why and on what basis or evidence. At the time, they were guidelines. But the doctor had no conclusive proof exactly how much time was necessary to heal a concussion. Healing times are different. There was no test, no baseline. What the book does well is take the reader from that time when things were murky to the death of Mike Webster when there was a change. A Nigerian, Dr. Omalu, made the decision to study the Hall of Famer's brain even though he died of a heart attack due to what the doctor had read about the player's odd behavior over the last few years.

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