

## Written evidence submitted by Peter Robinson

Dear Sirs,

My name is Peter Robinson, I am the father of Benjamin Robinson who was 14yrs old when he died back in 2011 whilst playing in a Schools Rugby Game.

During the game Benjamin was assessed/treated 4 times for head/brain injuries.

On all occasions he was permitted to play on.

In the last few minutes of the game Benjamin was knocked out and unfortunately did not regain consciousness again.

He died 2 days later in the Royal Victoria Hospital Belfast.

He was an organ donor and 5 people were gifted the chance of life.

In 2013 we had a Coroner's inquest into Benjamin's death.

<https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2013/dec/13/death-of-a-schoolboy-ben-robinson-concussion-rugby-union>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/14/sports/rugby/tragedy-forges-alliance-for-change-in-concussion-protocol.html>

The Coroner ruled that Benjamin's death was the result of Second Impact Syndrome.

Second Impact Syndrome happens when the brain swells rapidly shortly after a person suffers a second concussion before symptoms from an earlier concussion have subsided.

In other words, if Benjamin had been removed after his first injury he would have survived.

The inquest highlighted the lack of awareness and education around Concussion/Brain Injury and the failure of dissemination of protocols that were in place at that time to Coaches, Referees, Players and Parents and indeed the Coroner herself.

The Coroner in her summing up also showed a lack of understanding around Concussion/Brain Injury.

She stated "Benjamin was keen to play on" we now know the word of a Brain Impaired 14yr should not be relied on to whether he was fit to play on or not. (all players need protected from themselves)

Benjamin's school did not have a concussion policy and this was only introduced after the inquest.

The Northern Irish Minister for Education John O'Dowd instructed that all schools must adopt a concussion policy to make schoolteachers, coaches, pupils and parents aware of the dangers.

The Coroner also incorrectly stated that "Benjamin had passed all the tests"

We now know that there are no tests/Head Injury Assessments in Schools Rugby.

On each occasion Benjamin was treated he was asked a series of questions (Maddocks type questions) the belief being if he answered those questions correctly he was not Concussed.

These Maddocks questions are meant to be asked off the pitch once the player has been removed and are asked to rule in concussion and not to rule it out. In other words, a player could answer all questions correctly and still be suffering from Concussion/Brain injury.

The Coach could also be seen doing an eye/finger tracking test. (no such training is given in Rugby First Aid courses)

The Concussion protocols in place at the time recommended that if any Sign or Symptom of Concussion is shown by the player he is to be removed immediately and permanently from the game.

So not only was there a lack of awareness re Concussion/Brain Injury, there was also a misconception that there was some form of test that could be used as a filter to see if Benjamin could play on or not.

Governing bodies issue a PocketSCAT concussion recognition tool to help recognise the signs and symptoms, but what happened in Ben's case they used it as a diagnostic tool for a brain injury, this practice still happens today and needs to be addressed.

Governing bodies clearly say there is no HIA in the amateur game, but they need to expand on this and explain why this is this case (not medically trained).

In amateur game they replicate what they see at the elite level and think they are carrying out the correct procedure (culture over protocol).

The Coroners summary was a mirror of society's mistaken belief "that we can test a child on a Sports pitch for a brain injury", culture overrules protocols.

After the Coroners misleading summing up no one from the Rugby Governing Body corrected her that there was indeed no test and Benjamin should have been removed after showing signs and symptoms of Concussion/Brain Injury.

I believe the Benjamin's inquest was a real missed opportunity to properly raise awareness and educate the public in general and in fact was very misleading.

Since Benjamin's death I have campaigned for greater awareness around Brain Injuries in Sport.

As a result of campaigning leaflets raising awareness around Concussion were released to Schools in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland.

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/concussion-guidance>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-25844741>

<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-11/concussion-is-dangerous-welsh-government-guidance-on-concussion-for-school-and-community-sport-up-to-age-19.pdf>

I'm currently a member of the Scottish Concussion Advisory Board who's "If In Doubt, Sit Them Out" Concussion Guidelines for all Grassroots Sports released in 2015 was a Worlds first.

<https://sportscotland.org.uk/clubs/scottish-sports-concussion-guidance/>

After Benjamin's death I called for mandatory lessons in Schools, this still has not happened.

Educating the next generation is the only way we can change the culture around how we deal with Brain Injuries.

I am a Qualified football coach and I still see Brain Injured kids being asked “are you ok to play on?” this has to stop.

Edinburgh University Concussion Think-tank run Concussion Awareness/ Education modules available to their students (PE students) led by Dr Stephanie Adams(Edinburgh University) and this has shown to be very successful.

Education is key and also has resulted in a concussion education video being produced with key speakers/educators.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w9vTsyKWft8&ab\\_channel=ConcussEd](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w9vTsyKWft8&ab_channel=ConcussEd)

I hope this evidence assists in the Parliamentary Enquiry into Concussion in Sport.

Education is key.

Peter Robinson