

Written evidence submitted by Love of the Game

Digital, Culture and Sport Select Committee: Concussion in sport inquiry

The Love of the Game is pleased to have the opportunity to submit evidence to this important inquiry at a critical time for the future of our much-loved sports and athletes.

With a growing body of scientific evidence and player testimonies demonstrating a clear correlation between knocks to the head and early-onset dementia, this issue is now impossible for the Government and sporting bodies to ignore.

The issue of head injuries and concussion in sport impacts players at all levels of the sport, from the grassroots to international stars.

Despite the love of sport, as the related dangers become more scientifically clear, we are facing the prospects of significant rule changes to the sports we enjoy playing and the strong possibility of a steep drop in the number of people playing such sports. Taken together, both these things could see our sporting landscape change beyond repair.

Debate and words of support aren't enough anymore - the time for action is now!

Love of the Game

[Love of the Game](#) is a campaign group which seeks to reduce concussion-related issues arising from contact and non-contact sports whilst also promoting the significant health-related benefits of playing sport. Crucially, we want to ensure that we reduce injuries whilst not dramatically altering the sports we play or unintentionally significantly reducing the number of people who play sport.

Love of the Game takes a solutions-based approach to the problem by working with athletes, technologists, academics and the business and financial communities to develop new technologies that will prevent, diagnose and treat head injuries in sport.

We are an impassioned community of athletes, players, fans, innovators and experts, united by our love of sport and the desire to, not only protect players of all ages from the potentially devastating impact of head injuries, but also to protect the integrity of the sports we know and love. Love of the Game aims to preserve our sports by reducing the risk of early onset dementia to players, lengthening sporting careers and reducing the fear of taking part.

Like most sports, success is the product of a whole team. Solving this crisis is no different. We have brought together a unique network of over 600 supporters representing the UK's major sports, government, academia, technology, science and business.

Love of the Game itself represents a meeting of the worlds of sport and business/campaigning through its founders: former England rugby union international Simon Shaw MBE and businesses man and dementia care pioneer [Laurence Geller](#) CBE. Simon, who played elite rugby for 23 years, now suffers from frequent memory loss, an issue he believes is caused by the severe knocks to the head he faced as a player. Meanwhile, after seeing the debilitating effects of dementia first hand, hospitality businessman Laurence turned his attention to the world of dementia research, funding and care innovation.

When the two met and shared their mutual love of sport and their respective experiences of severe head injuries and dementia, they decided to found Love of the Game as a campaign to promote the use science to solve this most pressing issue.

Solutions-based approach

Rather than focusing on the challenges of the past, Love of the Game's aim is to protect the players of the future and ensure that future athletes are protected from long term health risks yesterday and today's players have had to accept. In order to achieve this, Love of the Game promotes actions across a series of pillars:

- Education
 - Improving recognition of the symptoms of concussion
 - Positioning the long-term protection of the head and brain as part of a player's training regime and routine
- Diagnosis
 - Promoting more coherent sharing of information to aid in the identification of diagnosis tools
 - Developing a more sophisticated method of identifying the signs of concussion at the point of impact and for markers over the course of a player's career
 - Creating impact assessment wearables and big data analysis to grade risk and severity of concussion and the proper course of action needed
- Treatment & prevention
 - Promoting multi-disciplinary collaboration (bringing together investors, inventors, researchers and sports experts) to accelerate product development, experimentation and implementation.

Progress in action - Hackathon case study

On the weekend of the 27th/28th March 2021, Love of the Game hosted the UK's first ever sporting Hackathon. The event brought together the brightest minds from the design, developer and engineering worlds combined with amateur and professional sports people, academics and researchers in the sport health fields. This unique selection of 100 experts collaborated to create solutions to diagnose, grade and treat the effects of head injuries and concussion within sports which were judged by a panel including Rugby World Cup winner Mike Tindall, Sunday Times Chief Sports Correspondent, David Walsh, and tech and media entrepreneur Lisa Winning.

The Hackathon was backed by a host of sponsors including the Princess Charlene of Monaco Foundation and endorsed by the Minister for Sport and Tourism, Nigel Huddleston MP.

Over the weekend teams drew inspiration from across sports, including rugby, BMX, cheerleading, football, and skateboarding and developed concepts and prototype ideas ranging from smart stretchers and oxygen chambers to protective head gear with in-built sensors and apps which all have the potential to help prevent, diagnose and treat head injuries before, during and after incidents.

The Hackathon only represents the first step. The winning concepts will be provided with ongoing mentoring and funding through Love of the Game to help take the ideas from concept, through to the design and development stage, with the eventual intention that they will be used by athletes and coaches on the field of sport.

The success of the Hackathon is a testament to what can be achieved when the best minds from across sectors come together. We hope that the Government and other organisations will take inspiration from Love of the Game's solutions-oriented philosophy and also seek ways to use their own resources and networks to be proactive in the fight against concussion in sport.

How Love of the Game can support

Love of the Game is an active player in the fight to tackle concussion related head injuries. As a well-connected organisation across stakeholder groups Love of the Game and its Chairman Laurence Geller are well placed to:

- Provide oral evidence to the inquiry reporting on the findings and ideas from this month's Hackathon into solutions for sporting concussions
- Convene stakeholders from Love of the Game's extensive network which spans sport, academia, engineering, businesses and campaigning.
- Lead and fund a review on the long-term effects of head injuries due to sport and examine policy options available to the Government and sporting bodies, which will benefit all parties.

Signatories:

- Laurence Geller CBE, Chairman of Love of the Game and Geller Capital Partners and Loveday & Co and Ambassador for the Alzheimer's Society.
- Simon Shaw MBE, Love of the Game President and former England Rugby Union international
- John Hambly OBE, Vice-Chairman and founder of the Samson Centre for MS