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SYFL president tackling 'serious issue' with concussion seminar

Football always has been a big part of Joe Scianna's life.

He played the game at the youth level, in high school and at Augustana College. Three years ago, he was elected president of the Sycamore Youth Football League. He coaches on the 9-year-old level in the SYFL.

Scianna also remembers what concussions used to be called when he played.

"Back when I played football, people got their bell rung, or had a little dinger. We had all of these little, tiny phrases," he said. "Those are all really representative of concussions."

That's why Scianna is putting together a free concussion seminar for coaches, parents and families that will run from 6 to 8 p.m. on July 27 in the Sycamore High School auditorium. You do not have to be a member of the SYFL to attend, and Scianna is encouraging as many people as possible across the area to attend the seminar.

With help from the Sports Legacy Institute, an institute that aims to advance the study, treatment and prevention of the effects of brain trauma, Scianna said the first 90 minutes of the seminar will consist of testimonials and education from concussion expert Dr. Robert Cantu and SLI co-founder Chris Nowinski, a former Harvard University football player and World Wrestling Entertainment wrestler. The last half hour will be an open question-and-answer period.

"We're doing it so they know and my coaches know that this is what you need to look for when you're doing a concussion and this is why it's a serious issue," Scianna said.

Scianna, a physician at Northern Illinois ENT Specialists in Sycamore whose specialty is otolaryngology (ear, nose, throat, head and neck surgery), said baseline testing for concussions – something done at the high school level at Sycamore and DeKalb – is tougher for youth football players.

"The answer to that is it's not real definitive. The high schools and middle schools do some baseline testing, but doing that baseline testing based on the educational level of a 6-, 7- or 8-year-old and having some consistency with the answers to the test, that's somewhat questionable," Scianna said.

Scianna said if an SYFL athlete has or is suspected to have a concussion, the athlete must be cleared by a physician before he returns to the field.

Scianna said he hopes parents and coaches will attend in high numbers so they can learn as much as possible about head trauma and decide for themselves what's best for their child.

"I love youth football. Football is a big part of my life," Scianna said. "I don't want to see people be scared away from playing football because of the fear of concussions or fear of the unknown. But at the same time, you can only battle that with education."

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