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Confronting CTE: A Blog Dedicated to Increasing Awareness in Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy

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**CONFRONTING CTE:
A BLOG DEDICATED TO INCREASING AWARENESS OF
CHRONIC TRAUMATIC ENCEPHALOPATHY**

A Thesis Submitted
In Partial Fulfillment
of the requirements for the designation
University Honors

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This study by: Caden Shea

Entitled: Confronting CTE: A blog dedicated to increasing awareness of Chronic
Traumatic Encephalopathy

has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the Designation University
Honors

Approved by: Christopher Martin, Honors Thesis Advisor

Dr. Jessica Moon Asa, Director, University Honors Program

The variation on a creative thesis that I formed was a website and blog that utilized research about Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy and how it affects athletes of all kinds, specifically athletes in the National Football League. The reason that I chose this topic is because the field that I hope to go into is that of sports journalism. One of the biggest problems facing sports leagues all over the world is the issue of safety. One of the biggest safety concerns in sports is that of head injuries, and one of the most prominent head injuries is CTE. I chose CTE because there is not a lot that is known about the disease, but there is a lot of misinformation out there. The reason that I created this thesis in a blog format is for the purpose of informing the masses through an accessible way that doesn't feel like an essay that goes way over the head of the average person. I think that a blog is easily understandable and user friendly for people of all ages and demographics.

The main steps that were taken in completing the thesis was doing the appropriate research on a particular topic and then transferring it to a blog format. I came up with a list of topics that I felt would be informative and captivating for my target audience. My target audience that I decided on was people who wanted to know about CTE but believe that the current research is too advanced for their liking. Another target audience that I wanted to dedicate this blog to are people that are concerned about the wellbeing of athletes in the NFL and other contact sports and want to know what is being done to help these athletes. I decided on these target audiences because me and my friends have discussed CTE in the past but find that we don't truly know what we are talking about in a lot of instances. I felt that we could be better informed about these topics rather than get all of our information from shows on ESPN like *First Take* and *Pardon the Interruption*.

The final work was a collection of ten blogs with varying topics from people affected by CTE to studies done about CTE and concussions. I created the website through Weebly, a site that allows you to create a website from various templates. It is very easy to use and made the process go a lot smoother than originally expected. I have used Weebly before in the past while creating a portfolio website to showcase my work from college. I found this time to go a lot smoother due to my experience with the website as well as how simple their blog option is to use. The only hiccup that I encountered was a time in which the program closed without saving and deleted one of my posts. This ended up helping me, however, and made me reevaluate what I wrote and draw better conclusions.

My final work is a collection of 10 different topics that are based around CTE. The first blog post is a description of what CTE is and how it affects athletes of all sports. The second post is an evaluation of a study done by Boston University and exploring themes of selection bias and the development of better helmets to protect from CTE and concussions. The third was a look at Irv Cross, an NFL legend who was revealed to have CTE after his death. The next blog post detailed the fight between the NFL and top CTE researchers and the current state of that relationship. The next two articles discussed combat sports. The first told the story of Chris Benoit, a WWE wrestler who had CTE which affected how he lived and ultimately died. The second talks about the UFC and if CTE is being found in fighters. I talked about common misconceptions about CTE in a blog post. I also talked about Junior Seau and Mike Webster, two NFL players who suffered from CTE. Both are the focus of the book, *League of Denial* by Mark Fainaru-Wada and Steve Fainaru. The last blog post is about youth football and the effect of CTE and concussions on children. All blog posts have the underlying theme of power and control over how people think through the media and large corporations.

I think that this blog is important because it takes a collection of studies done by multiple people and puts them in one place that anyone can access. It did not try to use any words or phrases that would confuse the average person. I tried to make it as plain yet informative as possible. There are a lot of confusing articles and journals about CTE out there. My goal was to make sure that it was easy to understand and that the reason for understanding it was clear. I wanted people to realize that there were livelihoods at danger every time athletes enter a field. Throughout this assignment, my opinion on CTE radically shifted. I went into the project thinking that the NFL was perfectly fine the way it is and even though there were a lot of people affected, it wasn't that big of a deal. After completing this project, I realize that football is a lot more violent than I originally thought. For a long time, the NFL did not care about the wellbeing of their players. What followed was a time where many people's lives were put at risk. I am now a proponent of much safer working conditions for athletes. I used to believe that it was just the nature of the sport, but now I believe that the sport must change to enhance people's livelihoods. You can find the website at <https://confrontingcte.weebly.com>.