# NFL research undercounted concussions

The National Football League's research into the dangers of head injuries undercounted diagnosed concussions, making them appear less frequent than they actually were, the New York Times reported on Thurs-

newspaper, citing confidential data that it obtained, said an investigation showed the U.S. professional football league omitted more than 100 diagnosed concussions from studies the league commissioned from

injuries to stars including include every concussion. quarterbacks Steve Young and Troy Aikman.

The NFL called the newspaper story "sensationalized.'

Concussions have become a focus of medical research and controversy in sports because of growing evidence that repeated head injuries raise the risk of long-term health problems.

"The Times published pages of innuendo and speculation for a headline with no basis in fact," the NFL said in a statement, adding the research the paper reits teams, including severe ferred to never claimed to teams were not required to

"The studies that are the focus of the Times' story used data collected between 1996-2001," the NFL said. They were necessarily preliminary and acknowledged that much more research was needed. Since that time, the NFL has been on the forefront of promoting and funding independent research on these complex is-

The Times said that when it asked the league about the missing cases — more than 10 percent of the total — officials acknowledged the

submit their data and some did not. The NFL said in its in the NFL has been a constatement that the research referred to in the story was partly based on team reports that were encouraged but not mandated.

The NFL told the newspaper the missing cases were not an attempt to alter the rate of concussions.

Earlier this month for the first time a top NFL official acknowledged a link between football-related concussions and chronic trauencephalopathy (CTE), the degenerative brain condition caused by repeated blows to the head.

The issue of concussions tentious one the last two decades, and the league recently reached a \$1 billion settlement with more than 5,000 former players who sued the NFL for not properly warning players of the dangers of concussion. NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell on Wednesday, at the conclusion of the league's annual spring meetings, backed NFL vice president Jeff Miller's admission during a congressional round-table discussion that there was a direct link to football and the degenerative brain disease

CTE as it related to an ongoing Boston University Study that found 90 of 94 brains of deceased former players showed CTE. Goodell and other league officials have said, however, that more research is needed to determine whether there is a more widespread link to the larger population of current and former players.

The subject drew more attention from the 2015 film "Concussion," which starred Will Smith as a doctor who fought NFL efforts to conceal his research on brain damage suffered by

# Griffin III can earn \$22M in Browns deal

THE SPORTS XCHANGE

Quarterback Robert Griffin III has signed with the Cleveland Browns

He has agreed to a two-year contract worth up to \$22 million **NOTEBOOK** including

The base of the deal is \$7.5 million per season in 2016 and 2017, NFL Network reported.

incentives.

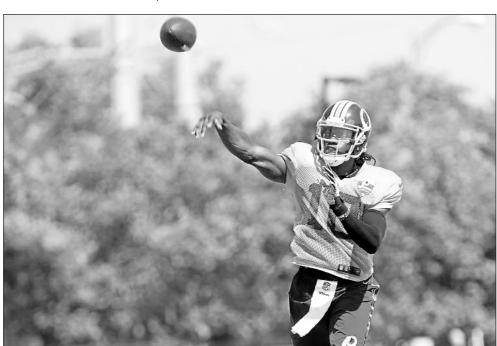
Griffin, the No. 2 overall pick in the 2012 draft by the Washington Redskins, was released before his fifth-year option hit the books at more than \$15 million. Griffin was replaced as the starting quarterback in Washington before the 2015 season began by Kirk Cousins, who was retained in March with the Redskins' franchise tag.

"I'm excited about the opportunity to join the Dawg Pound and build something here in Cleveland," Griffin said. "I'm just excited to come in and compete. "Nothing's ever been given to me in my life. I just want to go out and compete with the guys and grow with this team.

The Browns cut ties with Johnny Manziel and their QB picture is still developing.

Josh McCown is under contract but would be 35 before the start of the 2016 season. He could be a candidate to be traded, but Griffin didn't play much last season and is more of a reclamation project than a instant fix for the

"Confidence is the No. 1 key when it comes to playing quarterback in the league, aside from just the things that God blessed you with," Grifdence will continually grow skill set at the quarterback lution at the position for near- Day to meet with teams.



GEOFF BURKE | USA TODAY

Washington Redskins quarterback Robert Griffin III throws the ball during afternoon practice as part of Day Three of Washington Redskins training camp in August last year.

as I continue to work with my teammates coming up on April 4 and trusting the guys around me. They've got some special players there that want to win now, and I look forward to growing with them, talking with them and just not really putting everything on my shoulders to try to do it by myself. I know that those guys there can play, and I've just go to help them show that."

Cleveland also owns the No. 2 overall pick in the 2016 draft and sent a large presence, headlined by vice president Sashi Brown and head coach Hue Jackson, to the pro day workout of North Dakota State quarterback Carson last week. Wentz in Fargo.

"We are excited to add Rob-

high level in this league and is intent on doing everything in his power to return to that level on a consistent basis. After meeting with him, having him work out for us and doing our diligent research, we felt it was right to grant him an opportunity with our organization. We were able to see and feel his passion and commitment to re-establishing himself as a starting quarterback in this league and his embrace of the hard work that will be is essential to his development."

The Browns were also highly visible at Cal quarterback Jared Goff's workout

Solving the quarterback pecking order remains a mis-

position. He has played at a ly two decades. The next starter for the Browns would be the 25th since Cleveland's franchise was restored in

Cleveland showed some interest in San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick, with Jackson being a vocal supporter, but the price tag for a trade was high.

### **Huskies' Feeney to miss** school's Pro Day

Washington Huskies linebacker Travis Feeney will be unable to participate in the school's upcoming Pro Day after undergoing surgery for a sports hernia, Rob Rang of NFLDraftScout.com has confirmed.

Feeney won't be able to work out for clubs for anfin said on a conference call ert to our team," said Brown. sion for a franchise that has other four to six weeks. He Thursday. "I think my confi- "Robert possesses a unique failed to find a permanent so- will attend the March 31 Pro

Continued from Page B5

the board. And who in their right mind would think that you'd give up a draft choice to avoid doing something like that — something that I think would benefit the organiza-

Asked if the Rams had a deal with the NFL, Fisher said "Absolutely not."

At the time, the Rams were hailed for being progressive by drafting the first openly

gay player in the National Football League. From Balzer: Shortly after his college career at Missouri

ended, Sam came out publicly, acknowledging he is gay. The Southeastern Conference Co-Defensive Player of the Year in 2013, Sam was considered a fifth-round pick at best. However, as the draft proceeded on the final day, it appeared he might not be drafted at all.

It is believed the NFL didn't want to face questions about that eventuality, and the Rams were viewed as the ideal spot because of St. Louis' proximity to the Missouri campus in Columbia, 90 miles away, and Fisher's ability to deal with whatever distractions there might be.

So it was that the Rams saved the day, selecting Sam with the 249th pick of a 256-player draft. Now, the Rams are jumping back into the spotlight by making a quick agreement to participate in "Hard Knocks" this year.

The Rams moved to Los Angeles in January, and as the annual owners meeting closed Wednesday, in one of the earliest announcements ever, the NFL revealed that the Rams will be the featured team this summer on the HBO show.

It is no surprise the league wants to showcase the return to a market that was without a team since 1994. What is somewhat odd, but understandable in light of the revelation, is that the Rams are now embracing the intrusion of HBO's cameras in a year in which the distractions and logistics of the move will be a challenge for the organization, coaches and players. Especially since Fisher consistently opposed

having his team on the show. In fact, in 2014, about two weeks after the draft and the selection of Sam, Fisher was asked about the possibility of the league picking the Rams for the TV show. If no team volunteers to be a part of "Hard Knocks," the league can pick a team that hasn't been on the show for 10 years, doesn't have a new head coach and hasn't made the playoffs for two years. The Rams qualified on all counts.

Fisher said, "We are eligi-

ble, but I think it's highly unlikely they'd ask us to do it. I think this organization has a right to go through training camp with some normalcy."

Of course, that "normalcy" included a record number of press conferences for a seventh-round draft pick, plus having an ESPN report late in training camp in which teammates were asked about their shower habits and those of Sam. By a female reporter, Josina Anderson.

There is unlikely to be much "normalcy" this offseason, training camp and regular season, too.

In a press release announcing the decision, Fisher said, "This is an exciting time for our franchise. Hard Knocks will be an outstanding way to bring our fans into our training camp and preseason, and give a glimpse of the hard work and dedication of our players, coaches and staff as we prepare for the 2016 season.'

Of course, none of those players will be Sam, who was waived in the cut-down to 53 players in 2014, was briefly on the Dallas Cowboys' practice squad that season, then left the Montreal Alouettes of the Canadian Football League in the summer of 2015 without playing in a game.

One player still with the Rams is defensive end Ethan Westbrooks, who earned a roster spot as an undrafted free agent the same year as Sam. His story is an interesting postscript to the Sam saga. The Rams were high on Westbrooks, and he apparently was the team's target for one of its two late seventh-round picks. However, center Demetrius Rhaney was selected one spot after Sam, as it would have been unseemly to use that spot on Westbrooks, who plays the same position as Sam.

There is no direct evidence that the teams picking after the Rams were urged (told?) not to draft Westbrooks, but would anvone be surprised if that was the case as a thankyou to the Rams for taking everyone off the hook?

After all, Westbrooks received an unusually large \$20,000 signing bonus in addition to having \$30,000 of his first-year salary guaranteed. In the world of the NFL, that is not a large sum of money. What is notable is that the \$50,000 total guarantee was more than the slotted signing bonus/guaranteed money of \$45,896 that all of the seventhround compensatory picks received, including Sam.

In addition, to steer attention away from Westbrooks as it related to any obvious competition initially with Sam, the Rams announced when signing him that the lanky, 267-pound player was a defensive tackle.

# WR Washington catches on with Patriots

WIRE SERVICE REPORTS

The New England Patriots added another potential target for quarterback Tom Brady on

**PATRIOTS** Thursday, **NOTEBOOK** signing unrestricted free agent wide receiver

Nate Washington to a con-Terms of the deal were

not disclosed by the team.

The 32-year-old Washington spent last season with the Houston Texans after playing for the Pittsburgh Steelers from 2005 to 2008 and for the Tennessee Titans from 2009 to 2014.

In 159 career games, the Patriots plenty of depth guaranteed. McClellin inked Washington has 458 receptions for 6,954 yards and 44 touchdowns — and at least 40 catches every season since 2008. He also has 10 receptions for 86 yards in the postseason.

With the Titans in 2011, Washington experienced his most productive season with 74 catches for 1,023 yards and seven touchdowns. Last vear in 14 starts for the Texans, he totaled 47 receptions for 658 yards and four touchdowns.

Wide receivers Chris Hogan and Martellus Bennett signed earlier in the offseason, seemingly giving at the position after releasing Brandon LaFell this spring.

Julian Edelman, Danny Amendola, Aaron Dobson, Chris Harper and Matthew Slater return at receiver in 2016.

#### Long, McClellin file contracts

The contracts for defensive end Chris Long and linebacker Shea McClellin have been filed.

Long signed a one-year, \$2.375 million contract that included a \$500,000 signing bonus, and \$500,000 of his \$1.25 million base salary is million in total guaranteed Coach's son promoted Patriots head coach Bill

a three-year, \$8.95 million

deal that included a \$2.5 mil-

lion signing bonus and \$3.5

Belichick promoted his son Steve from a coaching assistant to safeties coach last week. As expected, he didn't bend over backward to discuss the move when asked about fatherly pride.

"I'm proud of all my kids," Belichick said.

However, he did concede, "He's done a good job. He's earned what he's received.'

# Sports A.M.

### Blue Jackets' Boll receives four-game suspension

Columbus Blue Jackets forward Jared Boll drew a four-game suspension from the NHL on Thursday for his actions on Tuesday night in a game against the Philadelphia Flyers.

Boll was called for interference after his late hit on Flyers forward Pierre-Edouard Bellemare and received a game misconduct penalty at 3:26 of the second period in the Blue Jackets' 3-2 shootout win in Nationwide Arena.

"I didn't intend to hurt (Bellemare)," Boll said, according to The Columbus Dispatch. "I was making a play, finishing a check. With how fast the game is happening, it's pretty hard to pull out of that hit. It might have been a little late; I understand the interference call."

As a repeat offender under the league's collective bargaining agreement, Boll will be fined \$82,926.84. It is the third suspension of his career.

## Ex-No. 1 picks seeks spot with Rangers

Matt Bush was long ago designated as the biggest draft bust in the history of the San Diego Padres

The No. 1 overall pick in 2004 later bottomed out on a personal level as an incident while driving under the influence led to a 3 1/2-year stint in a Florida prison.

Now age 30, Bush is in the mix to make the Texas Rangers as a reliever.

Bush's comeback attempt picked up steam on Wednesday when he pitched two hitless innings against the Chicago Cubs during a spring-training contest.

Bush had an opportunity to make the Tampa Bay Rays roster in 2012 when his longstanding issues with alcohol emerged.

He borrowed the truck of teammate Brandon Guyer and went on a drinking binge. He collided with a motorcyclist and nearly killed him and then left the

He later pled no contest to

DUI with serious bodily injury to a motorcyclist.

The incident and the ensuing prison sentence appeared to end Bush's professional baseball career. But when he was released from prison last Oct. 30, he could still throw 97 mph.

The Rangers investigated the situation and signed him in early December. Bush says he has been sober since the accident in 2012.

### MLB to open Mexico City office in 2016

Major League Baseball is opening a Mexico City office in 2016 and has renewed a deal with a long-time Mexican broadcast partner, the league said on Thursday as part of a bid to grow its fan

Mexico City will be the sixth MLB office outside the United States — joining Beijing, London, Santo Domingo, Sydney and Tokyo — and will direct league efforts to embrace local fans and partners of baseball.

- FROM WIRE REPORTS

