

**CHRIS NOWINSKI INTERVIEW
DENNIS AND CALLAHAN RADION TALK SHOW
WEEK OF OCTOBER 14, 2010**

Radio Host: Our No. 3, Dennis and Callahan - I'm not sure if inviting Chris Nowinski into the studio and we've done it a number of times, makes us smarter or just makes us feel stupider with his presence. By the way that entire résumé you heard Chris cite for you a couple of years ago on tape, he failed to mention that he also was a graduate of New England Tractor Trailer School as well so he did pretty well there. Chris Nowinski joins us in the studio. He first came to our attention when he wrote a book called Head Games, football's concussion crisis and was certainly on the a vanguard, on the leading edge of the concussion situation. Everyday is something new and different for you, is it not with CTE situation, with the fundraiser you've got going on, the NFL now getting involved. When we first talked, I think, if I remember correctly, the NFL's involvement in what you were doing, what you were saying and what your hypothesis was, was lukewarm at best. Is that fair to say?

Nowinski: They've annoyed you and hoped you would go away. Is was worse than lukewarm, I mean, they actually tried to get papers retracted and would, you know, say publicly this is a terrible science. So, I mean, they were...

Radio Host: They loosened the lug nuts on your tires in your car, right.

Nowinski: There were some concerns from some people but, ah, they were very much against what we were doing.

Radio Host: And he didn't think...Think of whose he's taking on Dino. The WWE and Vince McMahon.

Nowinski: Yeah.

Radio Host: He's public enemy number one in their minds and the NFL.

Nowinski: Right.

Radio Host: And I think you have prevailed in both, ah, counts, correct. They're both on board. Reaching out to you and trying to make friends, make a friend of you as opposed to an enemy because you're not good to be on your bleep list.

Nowinski: Laughter. Well, I appreciate that. I do think we've managed to change their minds, and they both completely change how they handle concussions and, you know, I got a nice call from Vince McMahon last week talking about how he wants to start supporting what we're doing. So it's...

Radio Host: Vince is on board? Is he going to give you a million bucks? In cash? Like the NFL did?

Nowinski: You know it would be nice. I doubt it. I don't know if he's that philanthropic. I think they spent most of their money, \$50 million on Linda's campaign, so they might have nothing left. But, uhm, it was very interesting to get that call. He actually, he first left me a message on my cell. I didn't think it was him because everyone does a good Vince McMahon impersonation.

Laughter.

Nowinski: So I didn't call him back.

Radio Host: You have a huge fundraiser coming up on the 20th. I believe that's next Wednesday. We'll get to that in just a second. The last time we talked the news was exciting and, in fact, I thought medically qualified as a breakthrough and that was on the heels of HBO's Real Sports doing the story that you and your research team made the ALS to head injury connection. Now we're talking about CTE's and suicides and things of that nature. Can you catch us up-to-date on what's happened research wise since last we've talked, Chris.

Nowinski: Sure. We've talked about the ALS connection last time and then, I think, the next week we released a very significant case. The captain of the Penn football team in a, committed suicide in April, hung himself.

Radio Host: Owen Thomas.

Nowinski: Owen Thomas who had been playing football since nine years old but had never been diagnosed with a concussion.

Radio Host: Mmm.

Nowinski: And Dr. McKee looked at his brain and found that he actually was suffering from a relatively progressed case of chronic traumatic encephalopathy. So he's actually the youngest case of CTE and it was shocking because we've always thought of this as a concussion issue but this young man had never had a concussion that anyone knew of. He probably did because we all do get them playing but nothing significant and so it raises concern to the fact that he probably got hit, you know, 20,000 times in head over his life.

Radio Host: So that would lead one to believe and I know it's a small study that is cumulative as opposed to one major event.

Nowinski: Right.

Radio Host: For head injury, correct?

Nowinski: That's exactly right and there's actually a good study that came out of Purdue last week where they put sensors in helmets and found that there were kids who'd never been diagnosed with a concussion but took hits that were confluent to 40 mile an hour car crashes who showed cognitive problems worse than the kids who had concussions meaning that getting hit in the head whether or not you really feel different could be is probably bad and both senses.

Radio Host: Was that... What woke up the NFL? What changed Roger Goodell's mind?

Nowinski: I honestly believe having been in the meetings with the NFL last year that it was Dr. McKee. Uhm, because the first pathologist who looked at this work said some, over interpreted the findings and was easily, was not as credible, and then when Dr. McKee went down there, and I remember the meeting specifically with their concussion committee where they said, well, couldn't this be this disease or that disease and she goes when I was on the NH committee that defined what that disease is so I'm pretty sure it's not. And suddenly, they're like wow this is real. She's the real deal and that plus Congress getting involved plus the media beating them up over and over again. Remember someone mentioned last night Malcolm Gladwell's article on this and you know.

Radio Host: Right, right.

Nowinski: When he got involved so.

Radio Host: And then the Real Sports thing which just opened everybody's eyes.

Nowinski: Yeah.

Radio Host: I'm sure they feel good about their commitment now and their million dollar investment. You shook down the NFL for a million bucks. That could be your greatest career accomplishment.

Laughter.

Radio Host: And you have done a lot, pal.

Nowinski: I appreciate that. Well, you know, hopefully, it's a continual, ah, donation. It's funny though we never even asked for it.

Radio Host: Really.

Nowinski: Yeah. No, we wanted them to support their research by encouraging families to donate the brains of former NFL players who passed away. But suddenly they said alright, we'll give a million bucks too. Well, as long as it's unrestricted gift.

Radio Host: Yeah and how's that project going because when last we talked, you were picking up the phone and calling people. And, and in fact widows of former NFL players and asking for brain donations. What's the....What's the brain bank look like?

Nowinski: Well actually we are up to forty-four cases now. We had a run two weeks ago that we got six cases in ten days. One, you know, a couple former NFL players, one that's significant I can talk about it only because the family put out a press release. There was a high school senior football player in Virginia named, Austin Trenom, who got a concussion in a Friday night game and committed suicide on Sunday.

Radio Host: Gee.

Nowinski: And he was an A student. He was, you know, like no problems and they had his, his family said there was, you know, just a minor argument about homework and he went upstairs and hung himself. And so they donated his brain to see if we can find anything relative to the CTE and we're probably not going to be able to connect any concussion to that suicide but it's kind of medically impossible.

Radio Host: So the 400 brains.

Nowinski: We have 44 in the bank and then 400 people committed including, you know, the other day Taylor Troman decided to join the New England Revolution.

Radio Host: So he's one of those soccer guys we talked about last time. We've been just heading balls for years and years and years and didn't really think it was life threatening and may have suffered concussions without even realizing it.

Nowinski: Well, he wouldn't have suffered concussions in the heading so he took repetitive trauma thousands and thousands of hits to his head plus he, you know, his major concussion was in 2008 when he was going to make a play at the goal and the goalie punched him the face. That was his major concussion. That's what he hasn't been back for for awhile.

Radio Host: The numbers as I recalled in the HBO piece had some staggering statistics over in Italy from an Italian soccer group that indicates that sort of repetitive, as you said like, you know, a forty mile an hour car crash, a one hundred fifty times during your career has that a cumulative affect.

Nowinski: Right, right that we are talking about the study showing that epidemiologically soccer players in Italy, professional soccer players have six times greater risk of being diagnosed with ALS during their life which is scary if you are a soccer player. I mean it's like twenty, thirty or forty guys in Italy that played pro soccer.

Radio Host: And in recent months you've got 400 committed people who are alive, maybe not well, but alive and still with us.

Nowinski: And concerned.

Radio Host: And concerned and said you can look at my brain when I'm no longer using it.

Nowinski: Right, right. Since 2008, we started that register with Ted Johnson being the first guy to sign up for it and now people call us everyday asking to sign up and be a part of the solution.

Radio Host: Can I donate meters?

Laughter.

Nowinski: Absolutely.

Radio Host: Do you have a spare one for Chach? Can you give one back?

An extra one that looks pretty healthy.

Laughter.

Radio Host: Are you trying to change football.

Nowinski: I think absolutely we're trying to change football. Uhm, I think, you know, we have to remember that we look back historically, football's really just evolved constantly.

Radio Host: Right. It is and the biggest myth and we talk about this all the time is it used to be harder, tougher, meaners, more dangerous. It is so dangerous now as we see every week, we sit here and last week. Look at the injury list. Green Bay Packers and guys just going down and it is a vicious, violent game now a game that we didn't see, you know, a generation ago.

Nowinski: Right.

Radio Host: Even with Dick Buckus and Ray Nitchke and, you know, Sam Huff and Mike Curtis, they didn't, we didn't see hits like we see on virtually every play today.

Nowinski: You know you are absolutely right and so and also the other thing that's spread historically is the involvement of kids. I mean this was invented as an adult's game. College athletes and then Pro and then down to kids. And so we're really, really focused on changing the kid's game. The idea that kids should be playing the same game as adults, they should be hit in the head a thousand times a year while they're developing or while they're in school doesn't seem to make as much sense, and so we're talking about completely reinventing how we practice, not necessarily changing as much as how you play in weekends in the games other than the rule changes on head to head hits.

Radio Host: The chance to sit down for awhile. Is that the most important one. You got to sit out.

Nowinski: That is the most important one. The science is very clear that you're neurons, your cells in your brain, your axons are very sensitive and they swell after a concussion and more trauma to the head can really cause some serious permanent damage.

Radio Host: I think it's pretty clear that he already has changed the NFL's culture. Can you remember a year where a quarterback got dinged and is sitting out like Cutler sitting out...it's happened four or five times. And Roger's...And there is. . . You know what...Two years ago that's not happening. Who says ding anymore? Who says your bell rung anymore? You know you don't say those things and I'm a coach in youth eighth graders and if a kid says my head, you just immediately get off the field, you know, go home, go to the doctor and if your doctor, you sit out. When in doubt you just stay out and sit out. No one says, ah, suck it up, you know, you shake it off, shake the cob webs out.

Nowinski: Yeah.

Radio Host: All those tired old clichés. They're gone. You have essentially removed them from the lexicon.

Nowinski: Well, thanks. It is exciting, you know, one of the reasons that we're honoring the NFL next week and having Roger Goodell come in and accept the award is because I was just down at the CDC last week, and the CDC produced a poster that...the NFL produced one for their locker rooms for the athletes. It's very honest.

Radio Host: The Center for Disease Control, the Center in Atlanta.

Nowinski: Yeah, Center for Disease Control. And now they've made a poster to go in the High School and Youth locker rooms. And the group who funded it was the NFL. To say

like this is what a concussion is. This is why I need stay out there. There are serious long-term effects, are short-term effects and so it's just wild to see from where we were a year ago when I came on with this, say this isn't a problem to now they're funding the education.

Radio Host: Chris I want to talk to you about the fundraiser coming up next Wednesday and make it available and obvious how people can get involved. But a couple of questions from callers, if you don't mind, for just a couple of minutes.

Nowinski: Absolutely.

Radio Host: Al's in North Andover. Al, what do you got for Chris.

Caller: Hi guys. Sorry.

Radio Host: Hi Al.

Caller: Chris, first of all, thanks for doing this, you know, it's very important. I have kids. I have a ten year old daughter and a seven year old son and they're both in sports. And I wanted to know, my son, you know, is just playing hockey, he's just playing the ? level at this point. Have you done any studies about Hockey and is it worse than football, the same, you know, how's that going.

Nowinski: There haven't been, there's some good studies on hockey in terms of concussions. The collisions in hockey can be bigger because you're on skates. And so this movement now, especially at the NHL level to really seriously penalize hits from the side or from behind to the head intentionally, it's the head is a big issue. There was a study that came out a few months ago that saw that if a player can see a hit coming there much, much less likely to get a concussion so teaching youth athletes to keep their heads on the swivel and see hits coming but also teaching the hitters to respect there opponent and not go for the head is a big deal.

Radio Host: Now you got Jenny Thompson to donate her brain, correct? The swimmer.

Nowinski: Yes.

Radio Host: Why would a swimmer...is she swam into the walls or something. I always wondered. Why is she relevant here?

Nowinski: Jenny or Dr. Thompson, as I call her. She's a doctor in town. She's an anesthesiologist to pregnant women. She joined because she hasn't had concussions. She gets what we're doing. She wants to be supportive to this effort and also there are still people like scientists out there who wonder, you know, even though we're not up to in the literature eighty some cases of this disease of CTE. All, everyone whose gotten it has been through enormous trauma that's the one link that they have is repetitive trauma. Some people still think well wonder if it's just training everyday very hard for four hours and it's over exercising that could be a problem or it's, you known, something about a lead athletes getting CTE. There so theories out there with some scientist so people like Jenny are being involved is great for the science and also for the publicity because she's a rock star.

Radio Host: Is the ability or methods by which they can donate the brain part of an organ donor thing on driver's license or is more complex than that?

Nowinski: You can, the brain donation is not part of a regular organ donation program. So when you join our program, you fill out a whole lot of forms from BU School of Medicine and then you get a wallet card. So actually I have a card in my wallet saying that if I happen to get by a bus on the way out of here that they know where my brain is going.

Radio Host: The brain is theirs. How can people get involved in that first of all before we get to the fundraiser?

Nowinski: Sure, that's the Center for the Study of Traumatic Encephalopathy, BU School of Medicine, uhm, website is bu.eu/cste.

Radio Host: We can put that on our website, can we not Chach. Let's do that. I think we can. You got a big fundraiser coming up and is it sold out? Can you still get involved. ..can people give money to you, get money to you through this fundraiser next Wednesday.

Nowinski: Absolutely, there are still tickets available, still sponsorships available. You know our MC for the evening happens to be one, Gerry Callahan.

Radio Host: Oh well, there's goes the night right there. Oh, boy.

Radio Host: I'm going to make a bunch of jokes about, you know, brain damage. Something inappropriate. But Roger Goodell's the guest of honor, correct?

Nowinski: Yeah, we're honoring the NFL and Roger Goodell's coming to accept the award. So you can ask him personally what took so long for him to change his mind. Uhm, but yes, if you got to sportslegacy.org that's our website, sportslegacy.org or else you could actually call our event coordinator, Erin Parone, whose lovely, at 617-951-3799 ext. 336. Write that down.

Radio Host: Oh, thank you, we'll put it on the website. Tell us some of the other guests of honor because it's quite a star-studded list even though Dino's blowing you off.

Radio Host: I had a previous commitment. I'd love to be there.

Nowinski: Yeah, we've got a ton of athletes coming in. Guys like Ted Johnson, obviously a host and a former impact award winner, Mickey Ward will be there.

Radio Host: Oh, good.

Nowinski: Yep, Kevin Turner is coming in, you know Kevin, the former Patriot who's recently diagnosed with ALS will be there with his parents also seeing our doctors while

he's in town. Jay Thompson will be there, uhm, my old roommate, Isac Kavinsky, who played eight years in the league, the Harvard star. Don't crinkle your brow, he's a big star.

Radio Host: We know him, we know him, linebacker.

Nowinski: Yeah, yeah.

Radio Host: In the NFL or the WWE.

Nowinski: He's an NFL star.

Radio Host: I mean it's like a feeder system. Harvard right to the WWE.

Nowinski: Yeah, exactly.

Radio Host: Half the wrestling world are Harvard educated guys.

Nowinski: Brutus the "Barber" Beefcake will be there.

Radio Host: Did he go to Harvard?

Nowinski: No, he didn't.

Radio Host: Maybe his greatest accomplishment is he knows Stacy Keibler from the WWE.

Nowinski: Yes.

Radio Host: Did you get her there?

Nowinski: You know I should give her a call.

Radio Host: Call her.

Nowinski: I really should give her a call. She is very supportive.

Radio Host: I would cancel my event. I'd cancel my event right now if Stacy Keibler's there. In fact, you can replace Callahan with Keibler. I think you would do very well with that trade.

Nowinski: Yeah.

Radio Host: Chris Nowinski, ah, thanks very much for the time. Good to see you. Good luck with the event and continued success with all it is you do for sports and families and children and the NFL, as well.

Nowinski: Well, thank you. It's good to see you guys.

Radio Host: Chris Nowinski with Dennis and Callahan 617-779-0850, we'll take a quick timeout, get right back to your phone calls on the other side, and don't forget through the 9:00 hour we are giving away tickets to the Celtics opening nights against the Heat not selling them, not auctioning them, not asking you for eleven thousand dollars, they will be free in the 9:00 hour.