

## COLUMN | Football offers many benefits to families in America

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Staff Writer

Sitting in class the week before Super Bowl LII, a near-national holiday, I overheard a conversation about the historic American sport that deeply bothered me. A young woman was expressing to her friend that football is barbaric and that she will never allow her children to play such a horrific, dangerous sport.

Growing up around football, I witnessed first-hand the good that can come from the sport. I've seen the game benefit the bodies and minds of youth. Football builds character. It teaches discipline and leadership. One can learn the patience, resilience and commitment required to achieve goals, not only for personal gain, but for something bigger than oneself. Being on a team of 50 or more people can teach selflessness and pride for what can be accomplished together with a common goal. But lately, it seems these values have been forgotten, and I can't ignore the negative discussion to eliminate a sport that means so much to me. I'm not just talking peers, but I have heard politicians, doctors and lawmakers alike speak of banishing football in certain high schools, cities and even entire states.

I realize the main concern for those against football is safety, especially the effects football can have on the brain. I empathize with these concerns. Brain injuries are extremely serious and need to be approached with the utmost care and concern, but eliminating football is not the answer. Research and continued efforts and changes to make football safer is the answer.

According to the Chicago Tribune, the National Football League has made many rule changes to decrease injuries, especially to the head and neck, since 2002. These changes include prohibiting a player from initiating contact against another player with the crown of his helmet. Helmet manufacturers, such as the

popular brand Schutt, continue to research and develop helmets that lessen the impact and damage from tackles with the goal of one day creating a helmet that prevents concussions.

Yes, even more change and research needs to be implemented. Football is not a perfectly safe sport yet. But, before you start finding signatures to sign a petition banning the game of football, take a look at the real problems and dangers in life, and think about the families you might be affecting.

My dad has been coaching football my entire life. It's at the center of our family values. We've watched it strengthen our family, other families and even the community. As a coach's daughter, I am easily offended when people say they won't let their kids play football or that football won't even exist one day, especially when I see fewer young men try out for my dad's high school football team each year.

I know the risk of injury can be terrifying to some, myself included. I feared the possibility of a torn ACL or concussion daily as a Div. II women's basketball player. But risk is a part of sport, and there are risks in everything we do, even in something as simple as walking down the street.

Life is a game of risks, including walking, driving, football and much more. But with great risks, come great rewards, and the benefits of football are much greater than the unfortunate injuries that occur. The athletes I've had the chance to speak with who have sustained injuries in the sport are the most eager to return to the turf. They aren't afraid because, to them, football is a way of life worth protecting.

Of course, serious injuries are a different story, and if an athlete must resign from the game of football because of health concerns, I wholeheartedly support that. Safety should be the No. 1 priority. So, instead of dissing the game, let's come together to make the game even safer for the people it positively impacts everyday, like myself, my family and my community.

# JujiTSU has the Ultimate spirit



Submitted Photos

JujiTSU, the men's Ultimate club team, said Ultimate requires physical prowess to play at a high level. However, the players said observing spirit of the game is important to make sure everyone is playing the game fairly and is nice to opposing players, which brings all Ultimate players closer together.

BY JEREMY JACOB  
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JujiTSU, Truman State University's men's Ultimate team, will be playing for a bid to nationals this weekend at the regional tournament in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Despite the high stakes, the players hope to enjoy themselves.

JujiTSU builds basic skills rooted in various other sports such as soccer, basketball and football. Senior Blake Bixler, Ultimate head coach, said cutting through a defense, keeping the disc moving and having the proper throwing technique are all important in the game of Ultimate, but maintaining a fun atmosphere separates it from the sports it embodies.

"Ultimate is a culmination of a lot of different sports," Bixler said. "But under the umbrella of trying something new and not really taking itself as seriously."

While he is contributing to the team in a different role this year, Bixler said he played for JujiTSU the previous four years and enjoyed every moment of it. He said Ultimate is what he wanted to do at Truman after falling in love with it in high school.

Bixler acknowledges Ultimate is a physically demanding game, but he said it has a weird dichotomy of being competitive while having a relaxed culture. He said the biggest way Ultimate differs

from other sports is how it is self-officiated according to the spirit of the game. This is how players are expected to call their own fouls and resolve disputes without a referee, which Bixler said establishes a higher need for integrity, and he said it allows himself to approach the game like a dog chasing a disc.

"There's a difference between playing to win at all costs and competing at the highest level because you were trying to match your opponent," Bixler said. "Even in the most intense games, it's still silly. You're still chasing a piece of plastic in the air."

Junior captain Sean Eberle said he has been playing competitive Ultimate since high school. When they compete in tournaments, Eberle said he enjoys the competition and the game is even more challenging when it is windy, making it harder to pass. This is where he said the spirit of the game comes into play.

Eberle said the games can still get heated because of the sheer competitiveness, and fouls are bound to happen, but the spirit of the game also prevents malice from spoiling the joy of the game. Disagreement is handled with civility as he said players are encouraged to resolve the problem respectfully.

"The idea of spirit of the game is that you're playing in the most sportsmanlike way possible," Eberle said. "If something

does happen, you can discuss it and find a resolution."

Even though not everyone follows the spirit of the game, Eberle said its positives outweigh its negatives. In his experience, Eberle said spirited games tend to be more fun.

Senior president Nathan Pyles said he first experienced the fun nature of Ultimate in high school. Pyles said everyone in the Ultimate club was separated into teams to compete against one another, and he had so much fun that he decided to continue playing in college.

While he does have an athletic background in swimming, Pyles said he hasn't felt the level of commitment to any other sport as he has with Ultimate. He said it does have aspects that take a while to get used to, like the cutting needed for an open pass, but the emphasis on fun makes him want to continue playing after Truman.

"I was never the best at the mainstream sports like football and basketball," Pyles said. "I ended up being surprisingly good at throwing a piece of plastic around, so I just stuck with it really and enjoyed it ever since."

Together, Pyles said every member of JujiTSU and TSUnami, the women's team, is responsible for recruiting new players and showcasing the spirited nature of Ultimate. He said much of their



Junior captain Sean Eberle leaps to catch a pass. Prior to Truman, Eberle played Ultimate in high school.

recruiting happens during Truman Week when both Ultimate teams combine to play scrimmages. Pyles said this and their informal games on The Quad demonstrate what Ultimate is so people might want to learn more.

"When we say we play frisbee, [they say], 'Like with the baskets?'" Pyles said. "They're talking about frisbee golf. [We say], 'Uh, not exactly.'"

Pyles said JujiTSU is like its own community, but he said there is also a bigger community of Ultimate players outside of Truman. He said the virtues of spirit of the game follow a player wherever they go.

"Ultimate is a community," Pyles said. "If you're an ultimate player, no matter where you go, somebody recognizes you as an Ultimate player. That's an instant connection."

As for JujiTSU's chances for nationals, Bixler said everyone has played to their potential this year and needs to continue doing that to beat the fierce competition. Bixler said Truman must defeat one of the teams that have qualified for nationals — Air Force Academy, Colorado College and John Brown University. He said he considers this season a success already because the team funded themselves entirely after losing all funding this semester.

Whatever happens, Bixler said members of JujiTSU will always be a team united through the spirit of Ultimate. He said they look forward to playing highly competitive games against people they consider as friends.

"The games are going to be difficult," Bixler said. "There's a chance that we don't go to nationals, but we're going to have a blast doing it."



Senior Jared Favero tries to angle a throw past the defender. Handlers and cutters are the two positions in Ultimate — the handler throws the disc down the field while the cutters weave through the defense to get open for a pass.