

# TAKING IT HEAD ON

facts . stories . press . jenna's law





# FACT SHEET

- NAME Taking It Head On (TIHO)
- FOUNDER Jenna Sneva
- FOUNDED 2013
- HEADQUARTERS c/o Ronda Sneva  
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- SITE [www.takingitheadon.com](http://www.takingitheadon.com)
- EMAIL [contact@takingitheadon.com](mailto:contact@takingitheadon.com)
- PURPOSE *Taking It Head On, The Story of Jenna Sneva* is a youth based outreach project looking to spread the word on playing smart, competing strong, and staying healthy. We share Jenna's story in order to educate on the seriousness of head and brain injuries. If Jenna wasn't interested in being more than just her story she wouldn't bother, but she really wants you to hear her story and share it.
- ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS Championed Jenna's Law in the State of Oregon, effective January 1, 2014 SB 721 expands the provisions of a 2009 bill called "Max's Law" that requires public school coaches and referees to protect student athletes from brain injury.  
  
SB 721 adds coaches and referees for club and recreational teams to those who must get yearly training on concussions and who must keep athletes who have signs of concussion out of competition for a day and get them medical screening.  
  
Jenna Sneva, a former champion ski racer, after suffering repeated concussions as a skier, softball player and soccer player, was diagnosed with permanent brain damage. She recalled that when ski training, crashing was considered a sign of hard effort. If her coaches had recognized the symptoms of concussion, she could have been spared serious injury. "We need to protect the kids from suffering from the extreme pain that I did," she said. Her mother, Ronda Sneva, states that Jenna "might have a gold medal, but she has the brain of a 60-year-old stroke victim."
- JENNA'S MOTTO "Sit out... I didn't and now I will sit out for the rest of my life."



# STORIES



# JENNA'S STORY

Who said I couldn't be invisible? Who said, come on, who said it? Because whoever it was, it wasn't me.

I could sit here today and feel sorry for myself. I could sit here and complain how unfair the world is. And if I told you I never did those things and never said those things, I would be lying. Because the truth is it was incredibly unfair and who wouldn't feel at least a little bit sorry for themselves.

## **The Plans**

I had plans. Big plans, HUGE plans. I wasn't training and skiing for nothing. I was good. The coaches knew I was good. Everyone knew I was good. And I mean good enough for the Olympics good. I had already started figuring out what kind of cool things I would do when given my medal at the medal ceremony. It was definitely going to be something funny that would make people take notice and remember me.

Sure I could have been a little arrogant about it, and at times I was, but wouldn't you? But if I am going to be completely honest, again, it was always more about the thrill that it was about the medals and atta girls. There was just something about staring down the mountain that made me feel alive. Some people called me fearless and I was. Some people called me gifted and talented and I suppose I was. But it was always about just me, the mountain, and the way it felt when we were challenging each other. Maybe I am not explaining it all that well, but just imagine that one thing that makes your heart race in all of the right ways, when you are a little scared and whole lot of excited. When you get there you will know what I am talking about. I miss that feeling.

## **The Change**

I have been diagnosed with PCS, post-concussion syndrome and traumatic brain injury. Apparently, all those blows to the head that I took, the very same blows that might have been considered medals of honor and badges of courage by many where eventually the things that ran away with that feeling and in the end, my dreams.

I really do not know how many times I hit my head. Too many to count and who was paying attention anyway. It was all a part of playing the game, right? I skied, headed straight down the hill like I didn't have a care in the world. But I also played soccer and softball. I was the goal tender so people literally took shots at my head and I played softball at times like it was a contact sport. It was fun and it was exciting and like skiing, it made me feel awesome and maybe even a little invincible. And even if I could remember all of the times I hit my head, I am not sure I would want to now. Not now, not knowing what I know.

If you didn't know already, when you take a blow to the head, your brain gets a little rattled in the process and sometimes in that process the brain gets injured. You cannot see it so you don't even know it is there. But if you get enough of them, I promise you will feel it. I had debilitating migraines that no medicine could help. Sometimes I would just scream hoping that it would take some of the pressure off. And when screaming, doctors and my family couldn't help, I felt alone and scared. And with those feelings come a lot of other problems like depression and anxiety. But since no one could see my injuries, no one knew what was wrong with me. Even I thought I might be going a little crazy. But thank goodness for the diligent doctors and my dedicated family, they finally found out what was wrong with me and ever since then my life has not been the same. Both in a good and bad way.



# JENNA'S STORY

Because of all of those concussions, both mild and severe, I will never ski again. Never. Well, I could but in doing so I must realize that I would be taking my own life. One simple wrong move, one more ever so slight bump to the head could paralyze or even kill me.

Can you imagine? That feeling, those dreams, and my cool funny medal ceremony moment all gone. Seriously, sit back for a second and think about what that would mean to you and what you would have to give up. Ok, we are on the same page. I don't want you to give up those things that mean so much to you, as much as I wish I didn't have to give them up myself. But I would really appreciate it if you took care of yourself and those dreams. Promise me you will, and I mean spit on it promise me.

So never it is. Never is a hard word, let alone concept, for someone invincible, fearless and overflowing with dreams like me, or you. I didn't take never lying down and I certainly didn't take it easily. No skiing, no soccer, no softball, no wakeboarding, no bike riding, no running, no hiking, no white water rafting, no rough housing with the niece and nephews, and at one point no driving. So nothing fun ever again, right? Well that's what I felt like and for a time that feeling didn't help the depression and anxiety. But with time, love and some of that old determined spirit I am building new dreams.

## **The Future**

I am back in school, they never said I would be able to finish college. HA! Proved them wrong. I took to my therapy and brain remapping like I would a sport. I had coaches backing me the whole way, I practiced relentlessly and I went after things, like retraining my eyes, like I was headed for the finish line or home base. Because of my dedication, the same I used as an athlete, I recovered far more than they ever thought possible. And today I am planning for graduate school. HA, again! I want to help others who have suffered injuries like mine. I want to help them recover and live lives they could only dream about. I have plans, big plans, HUGE plans so you had better stay tuned to what I do next. I promise it is going to be amazing. And yes, I am willing to spit on that.

Today I do things a little different. But I would like to think I tackle things with the same determination and competitive spirit that made me such a great athlete. I still cannot do many things, but I am driving, living on my own, and thriving in a very complete life. Things they said I would never do.

I share my story, and I hope you will too, to help the next talented determined dreamer from having to live a life of broken dreams. Protect yourself and those you love and learn and teach that sitting out is not a punishment but a gift you can give yourself.

Mom says that my competitive and sometimes stubborn attitude has served me well. I agree, after all I am invincible.

*- As printed in the Brain Injury Alliance of Oregon quarterly newsletter, published Fall 2013*



wind  
The "Finnest" Place

DODV

AKIN

Jenna with her Gold Medal at the National Championships.



# MOM'S STORY

## Because Mom has much to say.

Jenna was always a naturally gifted athlete, the kind that picked up any sport and made it look easy. As a mother, I often asked myself, is it fair to her (not the rest of the world, but to her) that things should come so easily, shouldn't she have to work a little for it, wouldn't it make the victory even more sweet. Silly, but those are the things any mother ponders, I suppose.

Jenna couldn't be stopped from an early age. She was skiing, fearless, at only 3 years of age. She soon attracted the attention of the coaches on the slopes and was making a name for herself as the kid who didn't think twice about tackling the hardest challenges with a little smirk that dared others to best her. So soon began my long treks to this mountain and the next. Her commitment became mine as I drove thousands of miles, hosted many fundraisers, and championed her drive and pestered her to practice. I was proud of my daughter and did what I had to do.

Soccer and softball soon joined the club. More miles on the car, more commitment and even more pestering to practice. And though there were certainly bumps in the road, try being in a car with a strong willed teenager as much as I was, and see if you didn't lose your marbles from time to time, but I can honestly say I enjoyed my job as the athlete's mom.

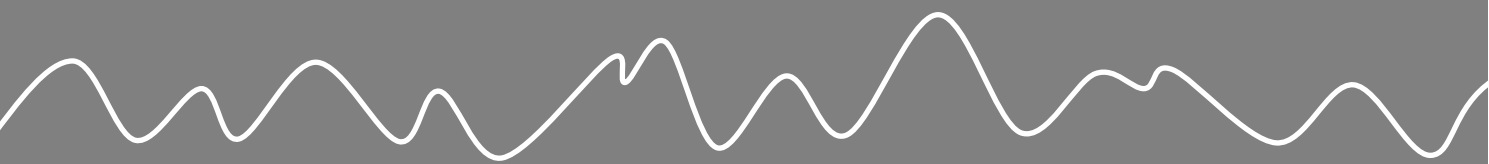
Then came the debilitating headaches, dramatic mood swings, and agonizing frustration that we now know are all symptoms of PCS, post-concussion syndrome. It took us a lot of time to figure out just exactly what was going on, and at times it wasn't very easy just dealing with the symptoms. But when we came to learn that those concussions weren't just little blips on the radar, we had no idea how much they would change our lives.

It was my job to get Jenna fed, out the door and on to whatever field she was charging that day. It was my job to support her, and yes at times pester her. Had I known it was also my job to make her sit out and rest up after each blow to the head, major or minor, I would have gladly done my duty. I didn't know, the coaches didn't know, the other parents didn't know, and many of the doctors didn't know either. That just dust yourself off and get back out there mentality is all well and good, but not if the signs of PCS and eventual traumatic brain injury are ignored. I didn't know then, but I know now. I cannot change what happened but it is now my job to share and inform others that each blow to the head could be serious and that there might not be any other job more precious.

The truth is, the athletic ability may have come easy to Jenna... but I know with all of my heart that the lessons of competition, discipline, and team work have provided Jenna with the tools she needed to overcome these setbacks with determination, and at times, a great deal of poise. Her attitude is good because of what sport taught her. I am grateful that what came easy for her, became her saving grace in the end. And even though the job has changed, I can honestly still say I enjoy my job at the athlete's mom.

*- As printed in the Brain Injury Alliance of Oregon quarterly newsletter, published Fall 2013*





# IN THE NEWS



The Sisters Nugget Newspaper  
By Bonnie Malone  
March 22, 2011

## Post-concussion syndrome takes toll on Sisters athlete

Jenna Sneva knew the first time she put on a pair of snow skis that she had stepped into her life passion. By the age of 13, she saw the Olympics on her horizon.

From the age of 7, she began winning medals, skiing in the Mount Bachelor Ski Foundation program and in youth and teen competitions at national levels. In April, 2010, at the age of 19, she won gold at the USA Snowboard Association in Skier Cross.

A wipeout worse than any she had suffered in her years of sports halted her dreams in 2010. It happened, not with a new injury, but with the discovery that she has post-concussion syndrome (PCS).

The stoic athlete, who never let pain dissuade her from activity, had been struck with severe headaches in February, 2010. She sought relief at the emergency room in Corvallis, where she was a freshman at Oregon State University. She was treated with migraine medications that were minimally successful, but "took the edge off," according to Sneva.

The headaches persisted, with five days a week of tolerable pain and two days of debilitating suspected migraines. She skied anyway, and continued with her studies.

There were two more visits to the ER; CT scans and MRIs. Physicians tried other migraine and pain medications, but nothing was very effective.

"I started feeling like there was no point seeing any more doctors because nobody could figure anything out," Sneva said. "I hated the feeling of being drugged, and medication really didn't help. I learned to deal with the headaches because I couldn't stop my life."

She was treated by a neurologist who tried everything from anti-depressants to anti-seizure drugs and intravenous steroids. No relief.

Then, in the spring, her third-quarter grades hit bottom, after an impressive beginning in her freshman year.

"My parents were disappointed, and I couldn't explain why," she expressed with sadness.

She could not stay focused. She was fidgety, extremely uncomfortable in large groups, suffering unexplainable stress. This was far distant from the very social person she had been. She felt like she was suffering attention deficit disorder.

Last September, she experienced the sensation of her spine being crushed. She returned to the ER, and the response was to try medication again. She frequently spoke "gibberish," nonsensical words and phrases, unaware until her sorority sisters told her. She had trouble thinking of specific words, much like a stroke victim. She was depressed with her inability to retain information or to do challenging school assignments. She would often run into door frames when leaving a room.

A family friend, an ophthalmologist, drove her to Oregon Health Sciences University, seeking state-of-the-art diagnosis. A sports medicine orthopedist reviewed her history and decided to evaluate her for PCS.

PCS is determined mostly by symptoms and patient history. When suspected, evaluation through tests of ability to think (cognition), brain and body coordination, visual acuity and a host of other functional exercises lends support to the preliminary diagnosis. With the current media blitz of creating public awareness of the formerly insidious disease, there has come improvement in early diagnosis and treatment. At the least, continuing activities after a brain trauma is being curtailed.

The findings for Sneva were shocking. Her verbal memory was less than six percent of normal, her hearing memory less than one percent. Overall, her memory was 33 percent of the standard. Diagnosis of PCS was confirmed.

For more information, please contact Taking It Head On at [contact@takingitheadon.com](mailto:contact@takingitheadon.com)



## Post-concussion syndrome takes toll on Sisters athlete cont...

The message: Her skiing days were over for at least two years, as were her other strenuous sports and activities. If she had another head injury, she could be paralyzed, or, her physician said, "you'll be lucky to remember your name."

Therapy was begun in an effort to remap her brain from its confused patterns. Sneva approached therapy as she has approached every goal in her young life, with determination, dedication and expectation of good results.

Visual impairment demanded an ocular (eye) therapist. This helped Sneva resolve a blank space in her vision that caused her to collide with doors and other objects. Her visual tracking had to be retrained with the use of prism lens glasses that she still wears.

Because she was unable to recite her ABCs when asked, cognitive therapy was intense. She could fit a square block in a square hole, but could not distinguish size. With the addition of physical and occupational therapy, the restoration of normal patterns of thinking and reduction of inappropriate response to mild life stressors began to show results. The process was long and exhausting.

Sneva was in Portland once a week for a day with four therapists. In Corvallis, she did another 3-4 hours a day of home exercise, brain teasers, puzzles and yoga. She was advised to leave school, but she resisted. A compromise was reached, with fewer classes and no difficult sciences. Mental stress could aggravate the condition.

A year after her symptoms began, Sneva has normal visual tracking, no fear of crowds, no episodes of colliding with inert objects and a new view of life. A new manifestation of passive seizures means she doesn't drive, but Sneva is realistic about the next two years of a different life.

Golf is the only approved sport, so her father, Gary, got her a new set of golf clubs for Christmas. In the spirit of a survivor, she has rekindled her enjoyment of golf.

Now, she wants to share her story with youths in her former Sisters schools, hoping they will learn from her mistakes. Returning to a sport soon after a head injury "isn't worth what I went through." Neither, she said, is her letterman's jacket, all the medals, patches and awards.

"I want to talk to kids who may remember me, and let others meet me so they have a personal experience with someone who has this disease. I want my message to be in the backs of their minds when they don't want to take six weeks off after a concussion. It scares me when I hear about a kid getting a head injury and being back on the playing field a week later.

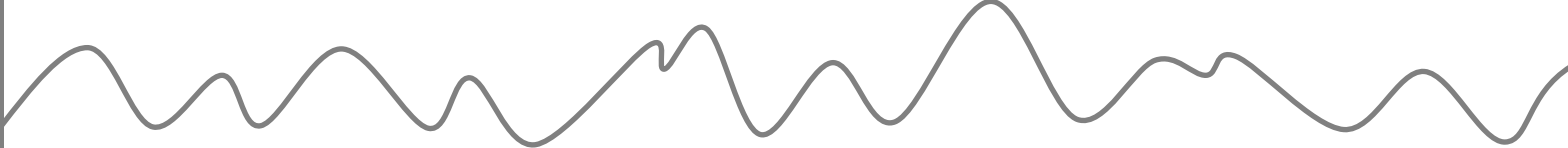
"I thought my sports activities were giving me the greatest memories, the greatest times, but I could have had different great memories. A concussion is a very big deal."

Her mother, Ronda, calls PCS the invisible disease. Fatigue, personality changes, headaches and lack of focus are signs that may indicate a very dangerous condition. In Sneva's case, multiple mild concussions were once considered something to "shake off." To this young athlete, "it just wasn't that big a deal."

Sneva has found strength in the support of her family, boyfriend and sorority sisters. She has also appreciated that no one was going to give her sympathy that would let her back off the necessary work she had to do. A few weeks ago, in a slump of depression, she texted her mother. Her mother responded, "But it's been a great 13 years."

Sneva feels that messages like this have been powerful and important, keeping her from indulging in self-pity. Her friend Hillary said, during the months of intense therapy, "You will get better, maybe not fully, but better." The backing of family and friends has taught her a valuable life lesson. Her personal relationships are different, richer, fuller and as rewarding as any medal.

She also realizes the outcome could have been very different. This is why she wants her story heard, more and more, until mild concussions are no longer called "no big deal."



The Bend Bulletin  
By Anne Aurand  
April 11, 2013

## Concussion are serious

A bill to expand requirements for recognizing and responding to possible concussions has passed the Oregon Senate and awaits consideration in the House. If it passes, it will require all coaches of all sports to have some concussion education. It prohibits coaches and referees from allowing athletes to play when they have signs of a concussion. It would require concussed athletes to have medical releases from doctors and an absence of symptoms before returning to play.

Senate Bill 721 complements the 2009 Max's Law, which did virtually the same thing for most high school sports. This law encompasses all recreational leagues and clubs, and includes all sports, even lower-risk ones such as swimming or cross-country skiing. It also includes an element of concussion education for parents and kids.

It would be called Jenna's Law, according to attorney David Kracke, with Portland law firm Nichols and Associates, who is pushing the bill. The law would be named after a local girl who has sustained serious brain trauma from skiing and soccer.

Jenna Sneva went through the Sisters School District, graduating from Sisters High School in 2009. She ski raced with Mt. Bachelor Sports Education Foundation and played club soccer in Bend since she was little.

She suffered so many blows to her head that she ended up with post-concussion syndrome — what it's called when symptoms and effects from concussions last for more than six months. During her youth, Sneva experienced 12 concussions, half of which knocked her unconscious, she said. She got them skiing, playing soccer and other sports, and from one car accident. It was the last big one in 2010, from a ski crash, that triggered the avalanche of symptoms, Sneva said.

She had frequent, severe migraines. After a history of academic success, she started failing classes. She lost her ability to memorize facts or understand science.

She saw many doctors and had many misdiagnoses, she said. No amount of pain medications helped her migraines. Finally, Dr. Jim Chesnutt, Medical Director of the Oregon Health & Science Sports Medicine Program, called it post-concussion syndrome. (Chesnutt has testified before a Senate committee in support of the Jenna's law bill.)

Her life is permanently altered. Sneva endured nine months of intensive speech therapy, cognitive therapy, eye therapy and physical therapy. She still does neck stretches to help headaches, and brain exercises such as Sudoku puzzles and word searches to restore her brain function. "Going to school is cognitive therapy," she said.

Sneva is a 22-year-old psychology student at Oregon State University in Corvallis. But sports are no longer an option for her, besides golf. "One more brain injury and I could end up in a coma," she said. She still has a lot of headaches. She's expecting early onset dementia.

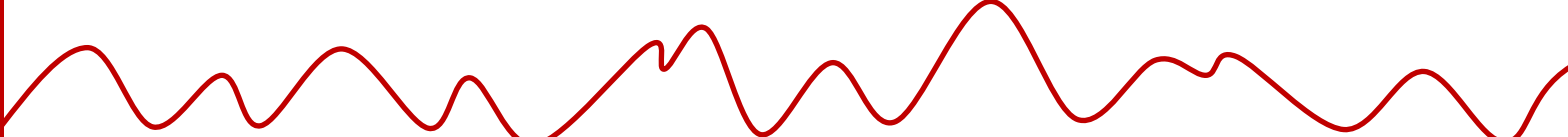
Her mom, Ronda Sneva, said her daughter still has problems with her peripheral vision and short-term memory. "That won't change," she said. "Recovery would have happened already."

She also noted that it takes Jenna 15 hours to do what most people can do in six hours.

"It's a permanent brain injury that is preventable," Ronda Sneva said.

Jenna has made concussion awareness a cause.

Her motto, for kids: "It's not worth playing on a concussion. It's not worth hiding. You need medical help. You get a concussion, you're out three weeks. I'm out the rest of my life because I didn't go get help."



KTVZ  
Reported April 16, 2013

## **Sisters woman inspires legislation on concussions**

### *Permanent brain damage changes Jenna Sneva's goals*

Dozens of medals, a national championship, dreams of the Olympics -- a girl who began skiing before she could walk, and a young woman who will never be the same again.

"My brain, technically, because of all the damage, is older," Jenna Sneva explained by Skype on Monday.

Sneva grew up in Sisters. A daredevil who loved speed and adrenaline, she began ski racing at Mt. Bachelor at the age of 6.

But her passion on the slopes came at a price -- Sneva suffered 12 concussions growing up, most from skiing.

Now 22, Jenna's inspiring legislators to pass a bill, dubbed "Jenna's Law." It's aimed at protecting kids who get concussions from sports -- a law that would require club sports coaches to get training on concussions.

The bill also would ban coaches and referees from letting athletes continue playing if they show signs of a concussion, and require athletes suffering from concussions to get a doctor's note before returning to play.

"It's going to empower the coaches, to be able to say no to the parents, no to the kids, that no -- they can't go back in," said Sneva's mother, Ronda Sneva.

It's something Ronda wishes doctors would have known when Jenna was little.

"During her brain mapping, they traced her first brain injury back to age 8," Ronda said.

Horrible news for a mother to hear, and looking back, Ronda says there were signs. Jenna changed from a gifted student to struggling with basic schoolwork. In middle school, she began struggling with anxiety and depression, and later, the worst pain in her life.

"My first migraine I had was Feb. 1, 2010 -- that put me in the hospital," Sneva said.

The last time Jenna skied was when she won nationals in skier-cross at age 19.

At 20, she was diagnosed with post-concussion syndrome and multiple permanent brain injuries.

Her future in skiing was over.

"It was a shock, you know -- I was being treated as a 60-year-old stroke victim," Sneva said.

But two years later, Sneva's doing much better, and has a new purpose: Fighting for Jenna's Bill, and spreading concussion awareness through her website, [takingitheadon.com](http://takingitheadon.com).

She wants to save other kids from permanent brain injury, and is working hard to earn a bachelor's degree at Oregon State.

And although she won't ever get that Olympic medal, she's still her mother's hero.

"She's a champion," Ronda Sneva said. "I've never been more proud of her than watching her testify in front of the (Oregon) Senate, or giving these presentations at these conferences -- she's passionate about it."

Sneva recently traveled to Salem to share her story with senators. It was passed there and now is waiting for a floor session in the House.

Sneva is a junior at OSU and hopes to earn a degree in sports psychology, so she can help other athletes suffering from injuries, forced early retirement and the pressures of being an athlete.

Video can be viewed at <http://www.ktvz.com/news/Sisters-woman-inspires-legislation-on-concussions>

For more information, please contact Taking It Head On at [contact@takingitheadon.com](mailto:contact@takingitheadon.com)



The Lund Report  
By Christopher David Grey  
June 11, 2013

## Jenna's Law Passes Legislature, Protecting Child Athletes from Repeat Concussions

*The House Health Committee amended Senate Bill 721 to build in legal protections to volunteer coaches who act in good faith to comply with the bill's intent, which is to educate them on the symptoms of concussions and keep children out of practice or games without medical consent.*

The Oregon Senate passed an extension of Max's Law to provide head injury protections to child athletes who play sports outside of school.

The Senate had previously approved Senate Bill 721, but a second vote was needed after the House voted on Monday to revise the bill to give legal protections to volunteer coaches and referees. The bill now goes to Gov. Kitzhaber for his signature.

Jenna Sneva of Sisters was a national gold medalist at 19, but after 10 concussions, she's not only had to hang up her ski poles, she told the House Health Committee that she struggles just to stay focused on her studies at Oregon State University, as she suffers from post-concussion syndrome.

In 2009, the state passed Max's Law, which applies to high school athletes, requiring coaches to be trained to recognize concussions and keep at-risk students off the field without medical permission, but no such protection was extended to children playing sports in non-school leagues.

"My life would be different right now if I were pulled out of practice and the games to be checked out by a medical professional," Sneva said.

Rep. Alissa Keny-Guyer, a Portland Democrat who sponsored Senate Bill 721, said there has been a lot of misunderstanding about concussions. "In the past, concussions were something you played through," she said. Today, many well-intentioned coaches just haven't been educated on what to do.

Senate Bill 721 or Jenna's Law, requires non-youth sports leagues to educate parents, referees, coaches and children over 12 to recognize the symptoms of concussions. And if a child does receive a potential concussion, they can't go back on the field, court, slopes or ice until a day after they are cleared by a healthcare professional.

Keny-Guyer said her oldest child went back on the playing field many times when it might have been questionable.

Max Conradt was the quarterback of his football team at Waldport High School, destined for college, when he received a blow that changed the course of his life. Already recovering from a previous concussion, he was allowed to play too early, suffering a second, more tragic blow.

"He collapsed at halftime with massive bleeding," Keny-Guyer said. "He now lives in a group home with other people who have brain injuries here in Salem."

Brad Jacobson, a ski instructor on Mount Bachelor, called the SB 721 a "no-brainer" in his testimony and said he would benefit from additional education to help others recognize the symptoms of concussions.

"Broken bones, cuts, bruises, sprained and torn ligaments are easy to identify, so deciding to sit out is an easy decision for coach, parent, and athlete," Jacobson said. "Concussions are a different story. You can't see the damage. The symptoms are not always obvious, and the coaches don't always know the athlete's history of concussions. To date there hasn't been a clear explanation of the various symptoms and what is the right thing to do."

"This bill is about education," said Rep. Jason Conger, a Bend Republican whose son suffered a concussion playing football.



## Jenna's Law Passes Legislature, Protecting Child Athletes from Repeat Concussions cont...

The original bill that passed the Senate had to be amended after three Republicans, including Conger, raised concerns about legal liabilities for coaches. It now gives legal protections for coaches and referees who act in good faith.

In a letter to Rep. Bill Kenemer, an Oregon City Republican, legislative attorney Dexter Johnson opined that the Senate version of SB 721 did raise the legal expectations of coaches and referees by increasing their knowledge of concussions.

"The likelihood of finding a coach or a referee liable under SB 721 is increased by the fact that the provisions of the bill do not offer any other means of enforcement," Johnson wrote.

Following up on Johnson's concerns, Rep. Mitch Greenlick, D-Portland, agreed to amend the bill. The House version now says that people who do not volunteer on a regular basis are not required to have training in concussions and, if an unforeseen event occurs, would not be held liable for injuries.

Those people who coach and umpire games on a regular basis will be required to receive training in addressing concussions but won't be held liable unless they showed "gross negligence or willful or wanton misconduct."

"I think this is a great improvement," said Sen. Doug Whitsett, R-Klamath Falls, who opposed the bill without the legal protections, but supported it on Wednesday.



NBC 5

Reported September 27, 2013

## Governor Kitzhaber Signs Jenna's Law

Jenna's Law was signed by Governor John Kitzhaber on September 16 in a ceremony at the Capitol in Salem. Nine members of Jenna Sneva's family were present with the young woman, who started a campaign to protect all young athletes from brain trauma more than three years ago.

As he entered the room, Kitzhaber, a medical doctor, said, "This is long overdue."

"It felt so unreal as the governor was signing," Sneva said, "but it also feels like such a relief to know that other athletes are protected."

Also present were Senator Elizabeth Steiner Hayward, sponsor of the bill; Dr. James Chestnutt, MD, OHSU Director of Sports Medicine; Attorney Dave Kracke; and Representative Tim Knopp.

"Three years ago, when Dr. Chestnutt told me I wouldn't ski or play soccer again, I wanted to kill him," Sneva said. "I didn't believe him and doubted the diagnosis. I had to remind him of that at the signing, and we both laughed. His testimony was instrumental in getting this bill passed."

The Brain Injury Alliance of Oregon (BIAOR) became partners with Sneva in the congressional campaign after helping with the success of Max's Law, an Oregon law that protects school athletes who have suffered concussions. It was they who chose to name the bill Jenna's Law rather than extend the coverage of Max's Law. BIAOR Executive Director Sherry Stock and Attorney David Kracke stayed personally involved from the beginning of committee hearings for Jenna's Law to its inception, just as they had done with Max's Law.

The campaigns to protect athletes culminated six years of their tireless effort.

The law, which is in effect January 1, 2014, protects youth in non-school athletic programs by imposing requirements for recognizing and responding to possible concussions. The bill includes education and available information about signs and symptoms of concussion for coaches, trainers, and parents. It also requires a physician's release for the athlete to return to a sport.

Sneva's dramatic story of the limitations in her life as a result of post-concussion syndrome led her to challenge the status quo of the attitude in sports about "bell ringer" brain injuries. With growing publicity about these injuries in professional sports and in returning war veterans, there was a timing advantage for Senate Bill 721.

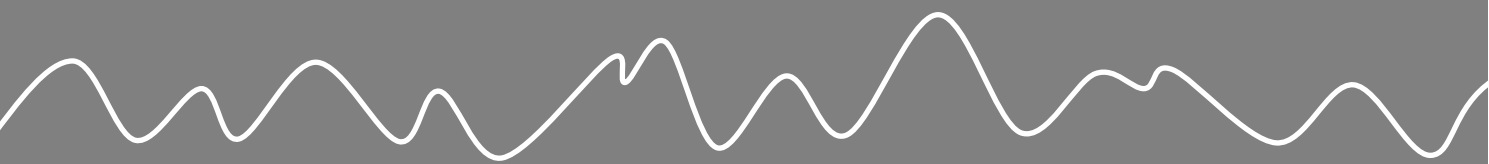
For the athlete who has questions or already suffered a concussion, Sneva and her sister, Catrina, developed a Web page, [www.takingitheadon.com](http://www.takingitheadon.com). It documents her experience and offers channels for help. Other avenues of creating public and professional awareness found Sneva and her mother, Ronda Sneva, speaking at brain-trauma seminars and workshops throughout Oregon. (Visit [nuggetnews.com](http://nuggetnews.com), and search "Sneva" for related articles.)

The Sisters High School graduate has made enormous progress in three years. She finished 15 credit hours of summer school this year with a 4.0 average in her psychology major. Despite the loss of her favorite activities - skiing, soccer, softball and snowmobiling - she has found a new way to live.

Sneva credits the research and determined doctors and therapists with her progress, and is grateful that the sports world has learned to respect the seriousness and deadliness of sports concussions. She is pleased that her story has been an asset in this discovery. Her family has been as supportive in her illness as they were in her sports successes. Life will never be simple for her, but it is manageable.

Now she sports a new trophy, maybe the most valuable: A law in her name that will protect youth in the future.





# JENNA'S LAW



# THE FACTS

## **Sports Concussion Fact Sheet SB721 Jenna's Law - As Presented by the BIAOR**

*A concussion is an injury to the brain caused by a blow or jolt to the head. Other terms used for concussion include mild traumatic brain injury or minor head trauma. Immediately following a concussion, a person may feel several types of symptoms affecting their cognitive, physical or emotional functioning. Symptoms can vary from one person to another, and can last for minutes, hours or weeks after a concussion.*

### **Recovery from Concussion**

Recovery from concussion can be different for every person. Symptoms can last from only a few minutes to days or weeks after the concussion. Long-standing symptoms can interfere with a child or adolescent's performance at school, or limit their participation in activities at home or in the community.

Therefore, it is important to systematically evaluate and monitor any ongoing symptoms.

### **Football**

- Football injuries associated with the brain occur at a rate of one in every 3.5 games.
- Football is responsible for more than 250,000 head injuries in the United States. In any given season 20% of all high school players sustain brain injuries and at least two will die.
- Football players with brain injuries are six times more likely to sustain new injuries.

### **Snow Sports**

The high profile skiing deaths of Sonny Bono and Michael Kennedy in 1998, and actress Natasha Richardson in 2009, lead to awareness and reports on the need to wear helmets and receive immediate medical attention in snow sports.

- 68,761 reports of head injuries sustained while skiing or snowboarding presented to ER's from 2004-2010
- Males have the highest rates at 68.8 % of total reported head injuries, snowboarders (57.9 %), and young riders between the ages of 11-17 (47.7 %) most likely to be injured.

### **Too many kids are returning to the playing field too soon after a concussion.**

- 62 % of organized sports-related injuries occur during practices 1 (Journal of Athletic Training).
- 41% of concussed athletes returned to play too soon, if an athlete's concussion symptoms, such as dizziness or nausea, last longer than 15 minutes, he should be benched until he's been symptom-free for a week. ( American Academy of Neurology guidelines).
- Girls have a higher incidence of concussion than boys - In some sports played by both sexes, girls actually run a higher risk of getting hurt.
- High school Soccer: female athletes suffered almost 40% more concussions than males (female players suffer some 29,000 concussions annually, males have 21,000).
- High school basketball: female concussions were nearly 240% higher (girls got 13,000 concussions playing basketball, boys 4,000).
- In girls' volleyball and boys' basketball and baseball, more than half of concussed players returned to play too soon (Journal of Athletic Training).

### **Mandatory Annual Coach & Referee Training on Sports Concussion**

- Currently youth sports coaches are required to have annual training to spot child abuse, but not for sports concussion
- Provide annual training through online and community resources such as Center for Disease Control (CDC), BIAOR, local hospitals and other non-profits
- Remove a child from play if they have concussion symptoms for at least 8 day-they cannot return to play without a medical professional's release
- Parents and students over 12 read and sign form on the signs & symptoms of concussion

For more information, please contact Taking It Head On at [contact@takingitheadon.com](mailto:contact@takingitheadon.com)



# THE FACTS

## Sports Concussion Fact Sheet SB721 Jenna's Law - As Presented by the BIAOR cont.

### How Common are Concussions?

- Each year more than one million children sustain a traumatic brain injury, 80-90 % of which are mild and are due to motor vehicle accidents, falls, and pedestrian accidents.
- The national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says as many as 3.8 million sports- and recreation-related concussions occur every year. In sports alone, 300,000 concussions in children are estimated to occur each year.
- Concussions can occur in a wide variety of sports, including (but not limited to) football, hockey, rugby, wrestling, horseback riding, lacrosse, basketball, cheerleading, and soccer.
- Brain injuries cause more deaths than any other sports injury. In football, brain injury accounts for 65 to 85% of all fatalities.

### Did You Know:

- A concussion is the most common type of brain injury sustained in sports.
- Most concussions do NOT involve loss of consciousness.
- You can sustain a concussion even if you do NOT hit your head. An indirect blow elsewhere on the body can transmit an "impulsive" force to the head and cause a concussion to the brain.

### Signs and Symptoms

*Parents may not be familiar with concussion symptoms. Contrary to popular belief, the child does not have to lose consciousness to sustain a concussion. In fact, the majority of children do not lose consciousness. A child or teenager suspected of having a concussion should be carefully assessed for any of the following symptoms listed below.*

#### ***Cognitive symptoms***

Poor attention/concentration  
Problems remembering  
Difficulty following conversation  
Answers questions slowly  
Asks same question repeatedly  
Mentally foggy

#### ***Physical Symptoms***

Headaches  
Vacant stare  
Appears dazed or stunned  
Dizziness  
Clumsiness/balance problems  
Fuzzy/blurry vision  
Sleeps more or less than usual  
Appears fatigued, tired or sleepy

#### ***Emotional Symptoms***

Nervousness/anxiety  
Sad  
Irritability  
Personality changes  
Plays less

### Concussion Evaluation

Appropriate evaluation and management are the keys to a safe outcome. The symptoms of a concussion can cause problems when the child returns to school, home or community activities. The concussion evaluation assesses possible cognitive, emotional or physical symptoms to assist in planning during recovery. During an evaluation, a child is given tests of attention, memory and speed. Test results are used to determine any needed interventions, as well as plan for return to school, sports, and other physical activities



# MAKING LAW

It is a long process. but this little bill (SB721) became law in a relatively short period of time, especially compared to its counterparts. but it only moved as fast as it did based on the support it received.

- Introduced February 26, 2013
- Passed Oregon State Senate April 8, 2013
- Passed Oregon State House June 10, 2013
- Signed into law by Governor June 24, 2013
- Ceremonial Signing with Governor September 16, 2013
- Law Effective January 1, 2014

Before it could be voted on and before it could be signed into law there has to be a lot of conversation... reading, hearings, work sessions, etc. some lawmakers were concerned about who is ultimately responsible, some lawmakers said it doesn't matter, let's protect these kids now. To get the many concerns worked out a lot of information had to be shared.

Jenna herself testified many times for the lawmakers. She shared her story, most of the time to a teary room. She answered questions and eventually explained how something like SB721 could spare another athlete from suffering her own fate or worse. Politics aside this was the right things to do for Oregon youth.

Testifying wasn't easy. But like everything she does, Jenna took it head on. Pun intended. Sure she was a little afraid and nervous. It is not easy putting yourself out there with a room full of very serious lawmakers. But jenna didn't shy away.

And neither did her mother. Ronda was along for the ride for the entire process. She shook hands, she made introductions, she rallied the troops when needed, and most importantly, she shouldered the stress that comes from trying to get a room full of people, who inherently disagree with each other, to agree. After all with Jenna's condition, stress only aggravates all of her symptoms. So in comes mom and this mom wasn't going to take no for an answer. Go ahead and ask just about every lawmaker represented... who would win in a bare knuckle fight them or the mom? :) Of course we jest! But seriously ask those lawmakers, had Ronda not called on each one of them look into themselves and see that this was absolutely necessary and just, would they have been able to tell her no... and Jenna no.

It does take a village to care for our children.



Jenna looking on as Governor Kitzhaber signs Jenna's Law making athletes safer in Oregon.