



# A Dent in the Plan

(NFL and Concussions)

**Quinn Hopp**  
**Lauren Garetto**  
**Haley Marsh**  
**Ashley Cannon-Rhea**  
**Stephanie Winner**

**Autumn Shafer**  
**J453**  
**PR Plan 1: Crisis Redo**

## I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“A Dent In the Plan” covers the National Football League’s (NFL’s) response and typical inaction to concussions in the league. The NFL mislead its players by failing to divulge information about the risks of concussions during their time in the league, resulting in further, and more severe, concussion injuries. The crisis has intensified over each year, and the NFL refused to publicly address it, angering fans. As media, a second key public, became aware of the scientific evidence showing the long-term effects of concussions, the NFL took a route of deliberate inaction rather than addressing the problem, leading to negative publicity and a public demand for action.

The plan will dive into the history of the concussion crisis that has led to the current intensified issue. It will also identify the NFL’s previous response strategies and propose a new plan with proactive and reactive strategies. It establishes the goal and objectives the NFL should have used during the 2014 concussion crisis targeting the following key publics: NFL players, fans, and sports media. Within each objective, there are strategies focusing on each of our key publics. With the players we will use proactively use organizational performance, while reactively using repentance and vocal commiseration. With fans as our second key public we will proactively use audience engagement, and with the media we will be proactively pursuing publicity. The redo plan will include a timeline showing tactics that will be used depending on the appropriate target. While every plan has limitations, we will explain how our new prepense plan has significantly less limitations than the NFL’s previous plan, or lack thereof.

## II. SITUATIONAL OVERVIEW

In 2014, the NFL’s concussion crisis continued to make headlines with a series of scrutinous articles criticizing the league for failing to publicly address the problem<sup>1</sup>, supported by statistics such as “one in three players will sustain head trauma.”<sup>2</sup> Public curiosity behind the NFL’s deliberate inaction and refusal to address concussion issues led to outside investigations.<sup>3</sup> New findings show that many long-term physical, mental, and emotional issues for former NFL players stem from concussions and other head injuries.<sup>4</sup>

The NFL has failed to respond to the concussion crisis. Its deliberate inaction has backfired, resulting in increased negative attention and media scrutiny, leading to speculation that the NFL does not care about its players. Scientific studies linking the long-term effects of concussions in former professional football players have become widely publicized and available to the public, raising awareness that the crisis was preventable and resulting in a call to action. PBS released a documentary called “League of Denial,” which depicts the NFL as a ruthless organization willing to sweep the safety of their players under the rug for the sake of money.<sup>5</sup>

Well-publicized incidents with current and former players Jovan Belcher and Jahvid Best have garnered further

---

<sup>1</sup> Breslow, Jason M. (September 19, 2014). The NFL’s concussion problem has not gone away. PBS Frontline. Retrieved February 12, 2016 from <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/the-nfls-concussion-problem-still-has-not-gone-away/>

<sup>2</sup> Belson, Ken (September 12, 2014). Brain Trauma to Affect One in Three Players, NFL Agrees. New York Times. Retrieved February 12, 2016 from [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/13/sports/football/actuarial-reports-in-nfl-concussion-deal-are-released.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/13/sports/football/actuarial-reports-in-nfl-concussion-deal-are-released.html?_r=0)

<sup>3</sup> Breslow, Jason M. (September 30, 2014). 76 of 79 Deceased NFL Players Found to Have Brain Disease. PBS Frontline. Retrieved February 12, 2016 from <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/76-of-79-deceased-nfl-players-found-to-have-brain-disease/>

<sup>4</sup> Journalist’s Resource (2014). Sports-related concussions and traumatic brain injuries: Research Roundup. Retrieved February 12, 2016 from <http://journalistsresource.org/studies/society/public-health/sports-related-concussions-head-injuries-what-does-research-say>

<sup>5</sup> PBS Frontline (October 8, 2013). League of Denial: The NFL’s Concussion Crisis. PBS. Retrieved February 13, 2016 from <http://mmqb.si.com/2014/05/07/nfl-draft-team-doctors>

attention and placed more focus on the issue. The key publics that this crisis is affecting are former and current NFL players as well as their families, who are directly affected by the long-term physical, mental, and emotional effects of brain injuries.

### III. ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

#### A. NFL Mission:

“To provide our fans, communities and partners the highest quality sports and entertainment in the world, and to do so in a way that is consistent with our values.”<sup>6</sup>

#### B. NFL Key Publics:

The key publics to the NFL organization are fans, communities (primarily the cities in which NFL teams reside).

#### C. History of the NFL:

The history of the National Football League dates to 1920. In 1922 they adopted their current name — The National Football League. The NFL was the first professional football league to successfully establish a nationwide presence.

The league’s first official championship game was held in 1933. In 1958, that season’s NFL championship game became known as “The Greatest Game Ever Played.” From that point on, the NFL popularized football to be considered America’s most popular sport.

The American Football League was founded in 1960, resulting in a merger. This is where the creation of the Super Bowl came from, and has become the most-watched annual sporting event in the United States. Now the league has expanded to 32 teams in 22 states.<sup>7</sup>

Since the beginning of the NFL, it has been a staple of American culture, popular across all social classes. While the league regularly makes headlines for scandals on and off the field, its popularity has not declined, and it remains an integral part of what people define as American.

#### D. Past NFL Crises:

The National Football League is a massive organization that faces crises on nearly a daily basis. Some of the recent memorable crises include the New England Patriots’ deflated balls<sup>8</sup> and football gloves being too “sticky.”<sup>9</sup> After such crises, the NFL once again became the center of the public eye due to their concussion problems.

### IV. CRISIS AND RESPONSE TIMELINE

- **January 2, 2014: Jahvid Best Sues the NFL, helmet maker Riddell and Easton-Bell Sports**

- No longer able to play in the NFL, Best sues the companies saying that the league knew that he had multiple head injuries in college, and they still allowed him to participate in the draft. Best’s lawyer, Bret Schnitzer, says the lawsuit aims to compensate for monetary value and hold the NFL accountable for future players. “Sometimes it is 10, 20 years where the brain injury process takes to develop, and it’s not necessarily going to show itself in a 24- 25-year-old

<sup>6</sup> National Football League official website (n.d.). NFL.com. Retrieved February 12, 2016 from <http://www.nfl.com/careers/values>

<sup>7</sup> National Football League official website (n.d.), NFL Chronology. Retrieved February 12, 2016 from <http://static.nfl.com/static/content/public/image/history/pdfs/History/2013/353-372-Chronology.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> ESPN (2015, September 3). Timeline of Events for Deflategate, Tom Brady. Retrieved February 2, 2016 from [http://espn.go.com/blog/new-england-patriots/post/\\_id/4782561/timeline-of-events-for-deflategate-tom-brady](http://espn.go.com/blog/new-england-patriots/post/_id/4782561/timeline-of-events-for-deflategate-tom-brady)

<sup>9</sup> Reimer, Alex. NFL Could Soon Look Into Regulating Sticky Gloves. SB Nation. Retrieved February 2, 2016 from <http://www.sbnation.com/nfl/2015/8/30/9227691/nfl-sticky-glove-regulations-odell-beckham-jr-catch>

football player to the extent that it might 10, 15, 20 years down the road," says Schnitzer. The NFL did not comment.<sup>10</sup>

- **January 4, 2014: Colts safety LaRon Landry leaves a playoff game against the Chiefs after taking a knee to the helmet. Before realizing Landry is injured, teammate Kelvin Sheppard runs over and smacks him in the head to congratulate him for making the play.**

- Colts defensive back LaRon Landry was unable to return to Saturday's Wild Card playoff game against the Chiefs after suffering a concussion in the fourth quarter. He went to the locker room for evaluation and was ruled out shortly after.<sup>11</sup> Landry misses practice, but no games due to the concussion. No comment from the Colts or the NFL are available.<sup>12</sup>



Colts I LaRon Landry injured: Indianapolis Colts FS LaRon Landry (concussion) suffered a concussion in the Wil... [bit.ly/1liGolp](http://bit.ly/1liGolp)

5:36 PM - 4 Jan 2014

4 2 2 2

[Follow](#)

- **Jan. 7, 2014: Roger Goodell Responds To League of Denial**

- *League of Denial*, a documentary that portrays the NFL as an industry so focused on making money that it would go to any length to prevent research might indicate that they are slowly killing their players.<sup>13</sup> NFL

Commissioner Roger Goodell says that concussions do *not* result from playing football as intended. "Using the head is not the way it's designed to be played," he said in an open letter on the NFL's website.<sup>14</sup> "The helmet is there for protection, not for a weapon." Public response of the documentary varies from sarcastic jokes to anger over the NFL's dismissal of concussions.



It's no accident that the NFL settled its concussion case before [#LeagueOfDenial](#) aired.

7:51 PM - 8 Oct 2013

4 247 52

[Follow](#)



If you're not angry right now, watching what happened to mike Webster, I just don't know how. [#LeagueOfDenial](#)

6:19 PM - 8 Oct 2013

4 8 1

[Follow](#)



Busy night ahead. I've been invited to dinner with the NFL owners and then we are all watching League of Denial together in our snuggies.

1:45 PM - 8 Oct 2013

4 20 10

[Follow](#)

<sup>10</sup> Rothstein, Michael (2014, January 2014). Jahvid Best suing NFL, helmet maker. ESPN. Retrieved February 2, 2016 from <http://es.pn/1mU1og8>

<sup>11</sup> Towers, Chris (2014, January 4). LaRon Landry Unable to Return Following Concussion. CBS Sports Fantasy. Retrieved February 2, 2016 from <http://cbsprt.co/1JU6smA>

<sup>12</sup> Florio, Mike (2014, January 7). Landry Misses Practice With Concussion. NBC Sports. Retrieved February 2, 2016 from <http://bit.ly/1TxTDA>

<sup>13</sup> Waldron, Travis (2013, October 9). 'League of Denial' Documentary Details How NFL Covered Up Concussion Crisis- And How Little It Cares Now. Think Progress. Retrieved February 2, 2016 from <http://bit.ly/1KmoKga>

<sup>14</sup> Goodell, Roger (Oct 4, 2013). Roger Goodell explains commitment to make NFL safer. NFL official website. Retrieved February 13, 2016 from <http://www.nfl.com/news/story/0ap200000254840/printable/roger-goodell-explains-commitment-to-make-nfl-safer>

- **January 14, 2014: A federal judge declines to approve a proposed \$760 million settlement of claims arising from concussions suffered by NFL players, saying she didn't think it was enough money.**
  - A federal judge declined to approve a proposed \$760 million settlement for claims regarding concussions suffered by NFL players. "I am primarily concerned that not all Retired NFL Football players who ultimately receive a Qualifying Diagnosis or their related claimants will be paid," wrote Judge Anita B. Brody of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania in a 12-page memorandum. The money needs to cover up to 20,000 players for 65 years, and does not see \$760 million being enough to do so.<sup>15</sup> In response, an NFL spokesman said the league respected Brody's request for more information.
- **May 7, 2014: NFL sends letter to team doctors about their role in health advising for the draft.**
  - All 32 teams meet to discuss whether a player is healthy enough to go into the draft. To determine their eligibility, they must be safe enough to participate. Safe is determined by two things. First, they are physically safe to play the game and secondly, they are worth investing in the draft pick, a decision that team brass and medical staff make. They also talk about the responsibility that players have to determine whether or not they want to play. "That's their call. Some physicians say if you flunk a guy, you affect his ability to make a living; I'm not sure of that. But I never will tell a GM or coach a player 'failed' the exam. It's all relative." NFL doctor Matava said.<sup>16</sup>
- **May 28, 2014: Former Miami Dolphins quarterback and 14 other former NFL players, sue the NFL over concussions.**
  - Dan Marino and 14 other former players filed a civil lawsuit in federal court,<sup>17</sup> alleging that the league has long since been aware there was a link between concussions and long-term health problems. The lawsuit took many by surprise, as it came from one of the greatest quarterbacks in NFL history.<sup>18</sup>
- **September 30, 2014: Report on former NFL linebacker Jovan Belcher, says he likely had CTE when he killed his girlfriend.**
  - Belcher's body was exhumed from his grave a year after burial. His brain showed evidence of CTE, probably the factor that lead him to kill his girlfriend and then himself in 2012. His family wanted to know what may have caused him to kill his girlfriend, and CTE testing can only be done post mortem. Comments about the findings were unavailable.<sup>19</sup>
- **April 22, 2015: A federal judge gives final approval to a lawsuit settlement between the National Football League and thousands of former players.**
  - The final agreement provides up to \$5 million per retired player for serious medical conditions associated with repeated head trauma — the settlement applies to all players who retired on or before July 7, 2014. "Today, these courageous men and their families have made history," attorneys Christopher Seeger and Sol Weiss said. "Despite the difficult health situations retired players face today, and that many more will unfortunately face in the future, they can take

<sup>15</sup> ESPN (2014, April 16). Judge rejects initial approval. ESPN. Retrieved February 2, 2016 from <http://es.pn/1SruFDH>

<sup>16</sup> MMQB (October 7, 2014). Always On Call. MMQB.com. Retrieved February 13, 2016 from <http://mmqb.si.com/2014/05/07/nfl-draft-team-doctors>

<sup>17</sup> Almasy, Steve (2014, June 3). Dan Marino sues NFL over concussions. CNN. Retrieved February 2, 2016 from <http://cnn.it/U8Dg2G>

<sup>18</sup> Keeney, Tim. Dan Marino suing NFL over Concussions: Latest Details, Updates, Reactions. Bleacher Report. Retrieved from <http://ble.ac/1Q98UCd>

<sup>19</sup> Kounang, Nadia, & Smith, Stephanie (2014, September 30). Doctor: NFL Player Who Killed Girlfriend, Self Likely Had CTE. CNN. Retrieved February 1, 2016 from <http://cnn.it/1sMCrMg>

comfort that this settlement's benefits will be available soon, and will last for decades to come.”<sup>20</sup>

## V. DAMAGE AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT REFLECTIONS

The NFL concussion debate has raged on for more than 20 years with little response from the organization. Ultimately, the NFL’s policy of deliberate inaction as well as its refusal to address the concussion crisis reflects poorly on it as an organization and has become detrimental to their reputation, especially as more information becomes public.

A 2009 study at the University of Michigan found that former NFL players had an increased risk of dementia, Alzheimer’s, and other memory-related diseases, all of which can be traced back to concussions.<sup>21</sup> The NFL, however, dismissed these findings as incomplete. A small group of researchers presented their discoveries linking professional football to crippling neurological damage, hoping that the NFL would make its product safer. Instead, the league used its economic, political, and media power to attack pioneering research and replace it with its own.<sup>22</sup> NFL executives co-funded a medical journal that depicted NFL players as superhuman, completely dismissing the plethora of research about the long-term damage of concussions.

Rather than silencing the issue, the NFL’s disregard appears to have only fueled the fire. Researchers such as those at Boston University’s Center for the Study of Traumatic Encephalopathy (CSTE) have made it their mission to prove the long-term negative effects of concussions on the brains of professional athletes. The CSTE has found evidence of chronic traumatic encephalopathy through autopsies of deceased former professional athletes who were known to have had multiple concussions.<sup>23</sup>

An official lawsuit was filed against the NFL in 2011, consisting of several separate, similar lawsuits; all of which were compounded together and brought to court as one master grievance. Each complaint alleges that the NFL had failed to provide information about the link between football-related head trauma and permanent brain injury. The case also alleges that not only was the NFL aware of the scientific evidence, but it intentionally turned a blind eye to the associated risks, failed to impose any safety regulations, and took action to discredit the proven causal link.<sup>24</sup> Eventually, the former players agreed to a settlement of \$765 million.<sup>25</sup>

This is not a debate that exists only in sports-related media. Mainstream as well as alternative media sources that do not primarily focus on sports have been known to report on it. As a result, certain publics who do not typically follow professional sports have become aware of this issue. *Mother Jones*, a San Francisco-based progressive magazine, published an article called “3 Ways The NFL Denied Football’s Concussion Crisis.”<sup>26</sup> Famed publication *The New Yorker* asks, “Does Football Have A Future?”<sup>27</sup> Publications

---

<sup>20</sup> Almasy, Steve, & Martin, Jill (2015, April 22). Judge approves NFL concussion lawsuit settlement. CNN. Retrieved February 2, 2016 from <http://cnn.it/1yTC7ip>

<sup>21</sup> Weir, D., Jackson, J., & Sonnega, A. (2009, September 10). *Study of Retired NFL Players* (Rep.). Retrieved January 31, 2016, from University of Michigan website: <http://ns.umich.edu/Releases/2009/Sep09/FinalReport.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> Fainaru-Wada, M., & Fainaru, S. (2013, October 2). Head on Collision. Retrieved January 31, 2016, from [http://espn.go.com/nfl/story/\\_/id/9755850/new-book-reveals-moment-nfl-no-longer-ignore-concussion-science-espn-magazine](http://espn.go.com/nfl/story/_/id/9755850/new-book-reveals-moment-nfl-no-longer-ignore-concussion-science-espn-magazine)

<sup>23</sup> Daniloff, C. (n.d.). Football Brains - Bostonia Web Exclusives. Retrieved January 31, 2016, from <http://www.bu.edu/bostonia/web/concussions/>

<sup>24</sup> Meyer, Rick (n. d.) Will The NFL Feel the Long-Term Effect of Concussions or Can it Avoid the Big Hit? New York Law School. Retrieved January 29, 2016 from <http://nflconcussionlitigation.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/MeyerConcussionPaper-copy.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> NFL, Ex-Players Agree to \$765 Settlement in Concussions Suit. NFL News. (2013, August 29). Retrieved January 31, 2016 from <http://www.nfl.com/news/story/0ap100000235494/article/nfl-explayers-agree-to-765m-settlement-in-concussions-suit>

<sup>26</sup> Gordon, I. (2013, October 2). 3 ways the NFL denied football’s concussion problem. Retrieved January 31, 2016, from <http://www.motherjones.com/mojo/2013/10/three-ways-nfl-denied-football-s-concussion-crisis-cte>

such as *Mother Jones* and *The New Yorker* typically cater to a more intellectual demographic, and the fact that they are reporting on this issue means that it is reaching a wider audience; garnering more attention and scrutiny. In 2013, PBS released a documentary<sup>28</sup> called “League of Denial: NFL’s Concussion Crisis,” promising to explore the “hidden world of the NFL and brain injuries.” Ultimately, the barrage of accusations, backed up by scientific evidence, portrays the NFL in an extremely negative light, making it appear dishonest and unconcerned about the health and safety of its players. In turn, the NFL’s refusal to take affirmative action to prevent or fix the issue has become more harmful than merely dismissing the evidence.

### **Objective 1: *PLAYER OBJECTIVE***

#### **Increase NFL player knowledge of concussions by 75% before the 2016-2017 NFL season as measured by comparing pre & post survey results.**

Due to the lack of acknowledgement or opinion previously given by the NFL, the new NFL concussion campaign has to initiate an acceptance objective. The NFL has been presented with evidence of the unprecedented effect of concussions. The responsibility will be taken in the hands of the NFL to provide information to NFL players as a key public. Providing information is an appropriate response for a preventable crisis.

The target audience are NFL players. The NFL players need to be the target audience because they are some of the people who disseminate information, negative or positive, to media and their fans. We picked them as our first key public because we are able to utilize two-step flow with this method.

The target measurement will be 40 percent because as contracted NFL players, the league can make it mandatory knowledge for playing in NFL games. Without the information about concussions the players could be a liability to the NFL. Forty percent is an attainable number because they are required to learn the information and will be presented with new information that they may have not previously known.

The measurement will be made by surveys, taken once at the beginning and once taken after the training. As the NFL makes this information mandatory for all players, and sees players without this information as a liability, there will be a survey or a test to ensure the NFL has a knowledgeable team member about concussions.

The NFL 2016-2017 season will be a perfect time frame because as the 2015-2016 season is coming to a close, and the beginning of the off season will allow time to educate players with the required information.

### **Objective 2: *FAN OBJECTIVE***

#### **Increase positive perception among fans by 15 percent that the NFL is actively preventing concussions as measured by pre and post social media survey during the 2016-2017 season.**

While acceptance and knowledge will begin internally with NFL players, fans need to be accept the NFL’s change in policy towards concussions. Media coverage has led many fans to believe that the NFL does not care about its players, and the league’s continued silence has caused public perception to deter.

Fans are a target audience because the NFL owes much of its success to its mass following. Fandom comes with ticket sales and purchasing of NFL-related merchandise.

---

<sup>27</sup> McGrath, B. (2011, January 31). Does Football Have a Future? - The New Yorker. Retrieved January 31, 2016, from <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/01/31/does-football-have-a-future>

<sup>28</sup> PBS (2013, October 7). League of Denial: The NFL’s Concussion Crisis. Retrieved January 30, 2016 from <http://www.pbs.org/video/2365093675/>

According to the Austin & Pinkerton reading, the majority of PR goals fail because of unrealistic expectations. At a 15 percent change to positive perception rate by fans, the percentage is not too ambitious and is attainable. The fans are a public that gets information second hand, making them less likely to accept the new information they are given about the NFL since it is not what they are used to hearing on the topic.

After the player training course, players and NFL affiliated accounts will release fan surveys via social platforms. The first survey will be released at the beginning of the 2016-2017 season and will determine public opinion for how the NFL deals with player concussions. The second survey will be released at the end of that season and will track if the NFL has made any progress in that year. It will also shape future player trainings.

Utilizing social media is the quickest way to receive results, and the most effective way to reach fans because most NFL fans follow their favorite players and teams on various social channels.

The NFL 2016-2017 season is a good time to have this objective accomplished by, so that within that year there is better reception to injuries that might occur during the season. We hope that the fans have an increased perception of the NFL as a league that cares, and are more willing to buy tickets to games or related goods.

### **Objective 3: *MEDIA OBJECTIVE***

**Increase positive published articles related to concussions from sports reporters by 20 percent by the end of the 2016-2017 season, as measured by comparing sports coverage from 2015-2016.**

Involving the sports media by inviting them to the six-week informational training session hosted by the NFL, will allow them an all access pass to this event. This is how we plan on including the sports media in the six-week training. We hope to frame coverage written about NFL concussions and can show that we are actively fixing the situation. This will also act as a two-step-flow method and will be more credible. If our fans get information from a credible news source, they are more likely to believe that the NFL is making changes rather than if a communications person from the NFL tells them.

## **VII. REDO PLAN**

### **Reactive Strategy**

As new information about the immediate and long-term effects of concussions surface, the league will approach concussion campaigns with an immediate response. In the concussion campaign, the NFL must choose vocal commiseration for the langst the information had on the NFL players and their families. The NFL repents the manner they previously approached the scientific community with the evidence they brought forth. With both of these strategies our players are the NFL's priority and top concern to initiate tactics that make them feel as though the NFL is concerned of their well-being.

### **Proactive Strategy**

Our primary concern moving forward is safety. To initiate our stance on safety we are going to initiate a six week educational course on concussions for the players. This strategy will go hand-in-hand with partnership, as the NFL plans on partnering with Boston University's Boston Center for Study of Traumatic Encephalopathy, as the nation's leading school for research on concussions. The partnership is equally important in legitimizing the intensity and knowledge that will be involved with this six-week course that NFL players are involved in. Through a trusted partnership, the NFL hopes to reinstate trust in the brand.

Audience engagement will be a strategy targeting NFL fans. Engaging with fans through live tweeting, promotional events and online quizzes about the concussion topic are all ways to generate buzz that targeted NFL fans can be involved in. To create the audience engagement with NFL fans, we are pairing this with a publicity strategy targeted towards the media as a key public. The media will help create positive information that will be disseminated through multiple traditional and nontraditional mediums that will reach NFL fans. Inviting the media to cover the educational session on concussions with the players will increase the chances of getting publicity from credible news outlets. While this publicity is uncontrolled, the NFL can choose the setting where press will be present.

## VIII. REDO TIMELINE

- **Jan. 2, 2014: Jahvid Best Sues the NFL. As a first-round draft pick for the Detroit Lions in 2010, Best sues the NFL, helmet maker Riddell, and Easton-Bell Sports over concussions.**
  - The NFL responds to Best, stating that they now highly encourage full disclosure of athlete injuries previous to the draft. Athletes who may have experienced head trauma will meet with a doctor who will educate them on the risks of playing football. The NFL hopes to change behavior by taking repetitive action through releasing a PSA featuring Best and reinforcing that health should be every athlete's first priority; it will cover all athletes not just football.
- **January 4, 2014 - Colts safety LaRon Landry leaves a playoff game after taking a knee to the helmet. Before realizing Landry is injured, teammate Kelvin Sheppard runs over and smacks him in the head to congratulate him for making the play.**
  - The NFL is rectifying their behavior through taking corrective action in order change behavior of head safety. The NFL is educating athletes at all levels, including NFL players about the seriousness of head injuries. The NFL will invite the YMCA to participate in a safety and drills camp which is being covered by traditional news sources, as well as sports bloggers.
- **Jan. 7, 2014: Roger Goodell Responds To League of Denial**
  - We will release a statement with strong enforcement of rectifying behavior, targeting fans, who we believe would be the main viewers of this PBS documentary. Goodell's response would reflect concern regarding the concussion problems, this concern would be mirrored throughout the entire organization. A communications member would have previously advised Goodell on responses that reflect the NFL's principles regarding concussions.
- **January 14, 2014 - A federal judge declines to approve a proposed \$760 million settlement of claims arising from concussions suffered by NFL players, saying she didn't think it was enough money.**
  - The instance the verdict goes out, the NFL will release a press release stating it understand the verdict that was made in court. The NFL will be working closely with players and their families to rectify the situation. The NFL will follow up with vocal commiseration by publically publishing a letter addressed to fans addressing their regret and condolences toward the situation. The letter will explain how while the the settlement was not accepted the NFL is working with the players and their families to ensure restitution of the situation.
- **September 30, 2014: Report on former NFL linebacker Jovan Belcher, says he likely had CTE when he killed his girlfriend.**
  - The NFL will vocally commiserate its deepest grievances to the friends and family of Jovan Belcher and Kasandra Perkins. It has come to the attention of the NFL that Belcher was

suffering from CTE at the time of his death. This tragedy has pushed the NFL to rectify its behavior and further study the effects that CTE. This will be released in a press conference held by the NFL's president, we will also make a donation to CTE research to show that we are dedicated to the cause.

- **May 28, 2014: Former Miami Dolphins quarterback Dan Marino, and 14 other former NFL players, sues the NFL over concussions. The lawsuit claims the NFL knew for years of the link between concussions and long-term health problems.**
  - We will make a vocal commiseration responding to how the NFL lacked immediate action. Rectifying our behavior is the next step. For the league to regain trust of its key stakeholders, we will partner with Dan Marino. Marino is integral in accomplishing our mission of becoming the figurehead of sports safety. Marino will work with trainers, scientists and medical specialists learning how to take preventative action, properly care for head injuries and detecting signs of a concussion.
- **April 22, 2015: A federal judge gives final approval to a class-action lawsuit settlement between the National Football League and thousands of former players. The agreement provides up to \$5 million per retired player for serious medical conditions associated with repeated head trauma.**
  - Once the verdict is reached, the NFL will respond vocally commiserating concern to all publics. Because the league knows when the verdict will be reached, utilizing the speed of social media is integral. It is crucial that the NFL breaks the news of the settlement so we can control the information. Posts will include what happened, how it will affect the future and a communications professional contact for the media to immediately reach. The communications professional will be an expert on the topic and will be educated on key messages that need to be distributed to the media.

The National Football League recognizes that harm has already been caused and are not able to enforce a preemptive strike. However, it is not too late to spread awareness of the issue. The NFL in this case has chosen to adapt to the repentance strategy. In total, the NFL will be the figurehead for player safety and will be an integral part of athletics across the country.

## IX. LIMITATIONS

The largest downfall of our new plan is that all strategies are reactive. Because we are unable to change what has happened in the past, reactive strategies are our only choice. We are choosing to use repentance because there have been loss of lives and feel that this situation is severe enough to do so. The downfall of this though is that it could not be seen as authentic. In order for people to trust that we are actually following through, utilizing two-step-flow through the media and players is crucial. Making sure that change in the NFL is coming from those with more credibility than PR professionals is the only way to make this seem genuine.