

**The NFC West:** The Los Angeles Rams have been playing well all season and will seal up the division as well. Seattle has been competitive but will be unable to catch the LA Rams Win and get a Bye in the playoffs.

**The NFC North:** This division has been a rollercoaster this year. The odds are the Chicago Bears will win this division. The Minnesota Vikings have the best roster in the division, and I think Minnesota will make the playoffs and be very competitive. Lastly, the Green Bay Packers are in shambles after a tough loss to Arizona Green Bay and the firing of Mike McCarthy. The Green Bay Packers will miss the playoffs for the second straight season and will likely be relegated to the basement of the NFC for the foreseeable future. Aaron Rodgers is difficult to get along with, the Packers front office is average at best, and coaches, players, and wives do not want to live in rural Green Bay, Wisconsin.

**NFC Wild Cards:** The Minnesota Vikings and Seattle Seahawks will more-than-likely win both the Wild Card spots, as Carolina will have to play New Orleans twice, making it very difficult for them to make it into the playoffs.

**Super Bowl:** I like Kansas City to defeat New Orleans in the Super Bowl. I don't think Drew Brees has the weapons to keep up with the Kansas City offense and the Lombardi Trophy returns to the City of Fountains. †

## Former NFL Players Continue to Come Out Regarding Opioid Abuse

BY RILEY EDLING

**I**T IS NO SECRET that painkillers can be equally as destructive as they are helpful. The natural addiction that many forms of painkillers hold have the ability to consume a person, having both immediate and long-term effects. One may ask in regards, to the NFL, why former players are continually coming out and discussing their abuses during their time in the league?

The NFL has seen major lawsuits for its mishandling of many cases of injuries and diagnoses. As former players grow older, they continually struggle more and more with each day. More than 1,000 former NFL players are addicted to painkillers and many players have taken to the internet to discuss their ongoing problems that they blame on the NFL and doctors for how they were treated. One person who has recently spoken out about the issue is Kyle Turley, a former offensive lineman who played for eight seasons.

In a YouTube video titled, "Painkillers in the NFL: Kyle Turley on playing numb," Turley talks about his personal experience of playing while on opioids. In an early remark, Turley stated that he had a stockpile of opioid drugs because it was always available to him. He even joked about having to give his dog Ipecac (a drug that causes vomiting) because it accidentally ate a bottle of his Vioxx (An arthritis medication now banned due to a high increase for heart attack and stroke).

Turley talks about the horrors of being an NFL star who was constantly battling injury. "It was really easy to look at a doctor and think, 'He's handing out them shots right now and I really need that if I am going to make it through the day.'" Vicodin, Percocet, Vioxx: it was all there whenever he needed it.

Turley makes a very strong argument that the NFL persistently goes after players for performance enhancing drugs, all while the organization simultaneously fuels players with drugs in order to allow them to play. He also goes on to suggest that for those players with serious injuries who know they shouldn't be on the field, the decision to return should be taken away from doctors and put into the hands of that player.

After Turley suffered a serious concussion on October 19<sup>th</sup>, 2003, doctors and trainers should have taken him to the sidelines to be evaluated. Instead of that however, he was given ammonia smelling salts, brought to the locker room, then was told he was okay and was returned to the field later in the game. This was just one of many issues Turley had discussed.

Turley later complained about having major leg pain. Team doctors told him that his new injury was not bad and it was due to a problem with his hips. This led to constant injections and an increase in prescribed drugs until he learned that he had suffered a major lower back injury. When coaches became aware that Turley was not getting better, they released him. With his increased need for pain medications, Turley was left without a job and without help.

After years of playing in the NFL and retiring in 2007, to this day Turley does not know the extent of damage that playing with injury and drugs has caused him. Now 43 years-old, he does not know whether his shaking hands or mental issues are precursors for CTE, dementia, or Alzheimer's disease, all of which are becoming a growing issue for former players. In a closing statement he admits, "If I knew doctors were going to do this — neglect your injuries situations, pump you full of drugs, put you back in games after bad concussions— I can honestly say I would have played another sport." †



Photography provided by Patrick Sison