

BASEBALL UNDER GLASS

Mike Adamle can be heavy-duty starter for understanding athlete-killing CTE's effects

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Normally this is a post about baseball.

Today it's about humanity.

Like countless others, I have been moved and, well, shaken by Mike Adamle's story. The former Bear and now former sports anchor for three Chicago TV stations is living testimony to what it's like to suffer from dementia connected with chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), the progressive neurodegenerative killer of retired football players.



Mike Adamle tells about his battle with dementia in his WMAQ-TV interview with Peggy Kusinski.

After getting over the initial jolt, I'm intensely proud of Adamle for detailing about life with CTE while he can still communicate about the affliction. Too many others, namely ex-Bears All-Pro Dave Duerson, were diagnosed after their deaths. Duerson was worst of all, a suicide. He intentionally shot himself in his heart so his brain could be preserved and studied for the effects of CTE.

Adamle's revealing interview with WMAQ-TV colleague Peggy Kusinski can be accessed at:

<http://www.nbcchicago.com/news/local/Watch-Mike-Adamles-Full-Interview-Part-One-413104143.html>

The more one watches Adamle's subdued, reflective responses to Kusinski, the more one roots for him one more time for being the ultimate team player. In this case, the "team" is the entire game of football, if not the whole human race. The Adamle that I grew to really like as a magnanimous fellow sports journo early in my career may have turned in his greatest-ever performance, on or off the field. He is what the late Jerome Holtzman once termed "a good man to know in a long day's march."

Instead of reading the scores and lead-in to highlights off a teleprompter, Adamle's play-by-play, sometimes halting, of life with a degenerative, fatal disease is must-viewing. Anyone connected with football should be commanded to watch – be they eve-

ry parent contemplating their child playing at the youth or high-school level, every college and pro player, and certainly keeper-of-the-bloated-exchequer NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell.

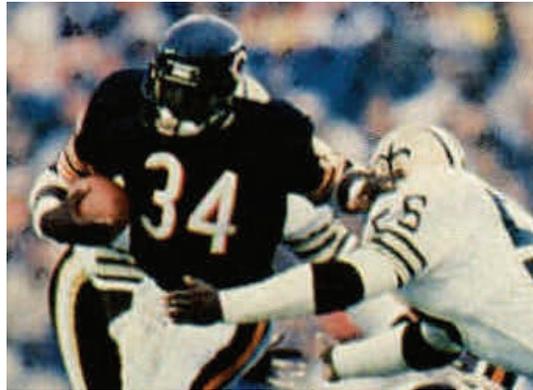
My own personal wish is I run into Adamle one more time so he can slap his meaty hand on my shoulder in greeting, almost as if he was going to push me down in a tackle on kickoff coverage. Or share steaks like one 1980s lunch in which Adamle eagerly reached over to consume the fat I had cut off my sirloin chunk.

Goofy and smart in one package

He was a delightfully goofy guy with a firm intellectual bent. Dummies majoring in gym class do not play football at Northwestern, in 1970 or now. I nearly fell on the floor when Adamle recalled some kind of ad-libbed poetry recital he performed at an itchy Hank Stram, Adamle's status in the balance, early in his career.

And I was nearly on the floor from tipsiness when Adamle shared his own wealth of relationships in Oct. 1983. I got the idea of doing a one-on-one interview with Walter Payton, but had no pull to arrange it. In stepped 1975-76 Payton teammate Adamle, then at WLS-TV.

After getting the word from Adamle, Payton agreed to meet me at his Schaumburg restaurant at 3 p.m. on a Tuesday, the Bears' off-day. But Sweetness was fashionably late – 4 and 5 p.m. passed without his esteemed presence. He called assistant Tracy Nguyen on the car phone to keep me occupied – in this case with Bloody Marys. I was listing to port when Payton finally arrived at 6:30 p.m.



Walter Payton did an extensive 1983 interview with a certain "Under Glass" author thanks to Mike Adamle's intercession.

Rallying quickly, I tied Payton down with a 90-minute interview. My final question concerned the secret of his longevity – he was in his ninth season with the Bears. Payton's answer: never staying in one place for more than a few minutes, and I had kept him there for an hour and a half. I had "tackled" Walter Payton. Adamle roared with approval when informed of my tactics.

For the next three decades he'd go in and out of jobs here and in New York while competing triathlons in middle age. A few times he'd show up with a crew at Wrigley Field. I offered to show the football expert around in a Baseball 101 style. Adamle laughed again. No need. He could BS his way through a report amid his typical good humor.

Adamle's attitude can indeed move the ball so much forward in understanding CTE and its devastating impact on football. The 21st century is indeed a golden age of medical comprehension of diseases and conditions that were formerly baffling and/or promoted ignorant stereotyping. And if the better understanding of CTE changes or deep-sixes football in the coming decades, so be it. How many competitors going back to the

leather-helmet days had horrible finishes to their lives as a result of literally having their brains scrambled?

CTE does not only affect football players. Soccer and other sports involving jarring contact of the head are involved. Longtime northwest Indiana trainer John Doherty dutifully documents findings in the field in his weekly column at nwi.com.

Amazingly, what Adamle's father, Dr. Tony Adamle, would have given to have a grasp on CTE. The elder Adamle, to whom his son was devoted, was a former All-Pro Cleveland Brown who had stints as team physician with his old team and Kent State University. Now Mike Adamle, without a medical degree but always with a surfeit of cajones, picks up the torch.

If Goodell possessed any courage comparable to Adamle's, he'd have him do informational videos while he still can. But Goodell will punt on this one. He does not want to start the process of killing the NFL golden goose.

Even amid his pain and suffering, Adamle has been given a kind of gift. He already has a broadcast pulpit and a reputation. It's not too late, as it was for Duerson, whose own status on the Super Bowl XX champion Bears could have made him a spokesman for research into CTE.

The career backup can now be a starter. Here's wishing good days for Adamle, who can find his real purpose in life at 67.