



Concern: Dr Sabina Brennan
By Katie O'Neill

Calls for ban on tackling in school rugby

TACKLING and scrums should be banned in school rugby to protect children from brain injury, medical experts have advised.

Writing in the British Medical Journal, leading academics Allyson Pollock and Graham Kirkwood point to a litany of evidence which shows collision sports such as youth rugby carry high rates of injury in young people.

The paper calls for harmful contact to be banned in the school setting, saying it will reduce the risk of injury for students.

It claims most injuries in youth rugby are due to the collision element of the game.

In 2016, 'scientists and doctors in the Sport Collision Injury Collective called for the tackle and other forms of harmful contact to be removed from school rugby', the authors write.

'The call for a cautionary approach and the removal of collision from school rugby and to end compulsion in the school game is likely to reduce and mitigate the risk of injury in schoolchildren.'

'Extreme and alarmist'

The report's authors say governments have a duty to protect children from risk of injury and to ensure safety.

But rugby's governing bodies have rejected the calls, describing them as 'extreme' and 'alarmist'. The Irish Rugby Football Union yesterday said it supported the World Rugby Union's criticism of the report.

'The continual claims made by Pollock are not based on like-for-like injury statistics and her extreme and alarmist conclusions are simply not supported by the data,' the statement from the World Rugby Union states.

'It is well documented that, for most sports, injury rates increase with age and yet the research quoted mixes 9-12 with 18-20 age groups.'

'Contrary to Pollock's opinion, the systematic published studies where injury has been properly



Risks: The report calls for no tackling in youth rugby

defined and monitored suggest the risk for pre-teens is not unacceptably high compared to other popular sports.'

The Irish Rugby Football Union echoed their statement, saying: 'Player welfare is the number one priority for the IRFU and we fully support the statement from World Rugby.'

Commenting on the report, Dr Sabina Brennan who works in Brain Health at Trinity College Dublin said the Government has a duty of care to children and must consider any risks associated with school sports.

She added that rugby is not the only contact sport that causes

brain injury: 'I wouldn't single out rugby as there is a risk with all contact sports, including soccer and GAA.'

'Concussion is particularly problematic in children because the effects of concussion last longer and their brains are far more vulnerable.'

'We must give special consideration to a child's brain, as it is continuing to undergo development until age 25,' she said.

'If a concussion occurs in a still-developing brain, it is not unreasonable to argue that the development of the brain will presumably be affected.'

'Younger children have propor-

tionately bigger heads than adults, and their necks are weaker and so their ability to sustain a blow to the head is not as great,' Dr Brennan said.

'Center for Brain Health researchers have found that as many as one in five children who had a concussion demonstrated comparable difficulties to children with severe brain injuries in higher-order reasoning skills, even as late as two years after the injury,' she concluded.

Ms Pollock, who co-authored the report, has been researching rugby injuries for more than 10-years.

katie.o'neill@dailymail.ie

Garda denies assaulting RTÉ cameraman during protest

By Tom Tuite

A GARDA is pleading not guilty to assaulting an RTÉ cameraman who was filming a violent protest.

Garda Seán Lucey, based at Crumlin station in Dublin, is alleged to have assaulted cameraman Colm Hand causing him harm at the junction of O'Connell Street and Cathedral Street on February 6 last year. He is also accused of damaging Mr Hand's camera.

He faced his second court hearing yesterday when he appeared before Judge Michael Walsh at Dublin District Court, where he was served with a book of evidence and sent forward for trial.

The incident allegedly occurred when gardaí baton-charged protesters who turned up in response to the launch of an Irish branch of far-right European anti-Islamic group Pegida.

Clashes broke out when small groups of Pegida supporters were heading towards the GPO from surrounding streets. About 1,000 people turned out for a counter-demonstration protesting against the launch of the anti-Islam group in Ireland.

A complaint was made to the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission, which had successfully applied to the district court to issue a summons against Garda Lucey on charges of assault and criminal damage.

The district court had heard Mr Hand had attended hospital and suffered bruising to his groin.

Defence solicitor Liz Hughes made an application for legal aid and furnished the court with a statement of the defendant's means.

Judge Walsh held that given the complexity and serious nature of the case, legal aid should be granted.

The defence had been granted an order for disclosure of prosecution evidence, including CCTV footage ahead of yesterday's hearing.

The complainant, Mr Hand, along with his wife, RTÉ reporter Laura Whelan, was also present for the hearing but he has not yet been called to give evidence.

Hiqa probe 100 disability cases in just 7 months

HEALTH watchdog Hiqa received more than 100 reports of concerns in relation to disability services during the first seven months of this year, including allegations of physical abuse, malnutrition, and unexplained injuries.

Several concerns relating to staffing levels were also received, with one such report warning that personnel numbers at a residential facility were so low at night that they would not be able to evacuate the building in the event of a fire.

One report alleged that a 'listening device' had been placed in the bedroom of a resident, while another complained that a resident's clothes had gone missing and been replaced with garments that did not fit.

A total of 116 unsolicited reports containing concerns in relation to disability services were received between January and August 2017. Report details were released under the Freedom of Information Act.

'Leo's house tax promise... isn't one'

FINE Gael has come under fire from Fianna Fáil over Leo Varadkar's property tax promise.

The Taoiseach pledged to move 'might and main' to ensure the charge on householders did not soar. But Fianna Fáil TD Charlie McConalogue said Mr Varadkar hadn't actually given a commitment. He said: 'It is action people want to see rather than headlines.'

And taking a swipe at the Government's new publicity machine, he added: 'We haven't seen anything from the Taoiseach on that, other than a statement, but it certainly strikes me as more of the type of thing that we have seen come out of the Strategic Communications Unit.'

'We are treated on a weekly basis to headlines without any substance to them. Last

By Jennifer Bray
and Senan Molony

week the Taoiseach was trying to fire people in the civil service and the Government seems to think that by announcing something in a headline that they are taking action but that it is not the reality.'

And the party's finance spokesman Michael McGrath told RTE yesterday that he had already written to Finance Minister Paschal Donohoe 'to say that property prices have risen 60% since the last valuation date in May 2013, and if we are to have a revaluation in 2019 then people are going to look at very significant hikes'. He added: 'The Government has allowed this to sneak up on them.'

Foreign Affairs Minister Simon Coveney

hit back: 'I am not sure how credible Fianna Fáil are on managing the property market.'

The Taoiseach was yesterday challenged in the Dáil on his promise, by Social Democrats TD Catherine Murphy, who asked what was the basis for his assurances. He said a working group had been established.

He added: 'The assurance I gave people yesterday was on foot of a question I was asked in London. In answering that question, I acknowledged that without a change of policy or without a Government decision, some people would be facing a steep and sudden increase of the property tax in 2019, not just in the greater Dublin area but also in other many parts of the country.'

'I gave the assurance that people would not see sudden or dramatic increases in their property tax in 2019.'