

Concussion specialist warns of football's hazards

By Linda Fine Conaboy

RENO – No child under the age of 18 should be allowed to play contact sports, forensic neuropathologist Bennet Omalu states in his clipped, fast-talking, often humorous manner.

Ranging from one side of the stage to the other, without notes, he continues talking to an audience of nearly 1,000 who have come to hear the doctor whose science is the subject of the recent movie, "Concussion", starring Will Smith and Alec Baldwin. Last week Omalu was speaking at the UNR Medical School's Healthy Nevada Speaker Series.



Bennet Omalu

"Children are prohibited from smoking and drinking until they are 21, but not from contact sports," he muses. "We have a duty to protect our children. When they play this game [football] they have a 100 percent chance of exposure to brain injury. We should not be afraid of the truth—it's child abuse."

Strong words, but this man has become a leading expert on traumatic brain injury, and through sheer doggedness, has made his findings familiar to at least a good part of the population. Most football fans know of Omalu, the guy who autopsies the brains of football players and has found that

there really is a reason for the sometimes erratic and unconventional behavior exhibited by some former gridiron jockeys.

Omalu autopsied Pittsburgh Steeler and Kansas City Chief center, "Iron" Mike Webster's brain after his untimely death. Although he was disabled before his retirement from football, after retirement, it was obvious Webster suffered from amnesia, dementia, depression and acute bone and muscle pain. He lived out of his pickup, and in 2002, died of a heart attack.

"Concussion" graphically depicts Webster's shattered life after football, his death and his relationship to Omalu, who examined his brain tissue and determined that amazingly, his brain was a fairly normal one, even though there is speculation that Webster exhibited the effects of someone who had been in 25,000 auto accidents over 25 years of playing football in high school, college and professionally.

But Omalu's road to Webster and international fame as the person who finally discovered what was killing football players was a bumpy one.

Born in 1968, Omalu has six siblings and is a Nigerian-American physician, forensic pathologist and neuropathologist who was the first to discover and publish findings of chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) in American football players while he worked at the coroner's office in Pittsburgh.

He said as a child he discovered his imagination and also discovered the power of education. "If I'm educated," he thought, "I have power over you. I studied hard and became a physician at 21. I was a simple man leading a simple life."

But life at university wasn't easy for him. "At med school I became extremely depressed and dropped out of school. Even though I was suffering, my parents punished me. To be myself, that's all I wanted to be."

He said he learned about the United States from the media; he arrived in Seattle in 1994 with \$200, only to come face-to-face with racism, a subject previously foreign to him.

"I knew nothing about slavery, but then I discovered another Bennet and learned it's OK to be him," he said with a chuckle. "I must be true to myself. I've only got one life to live. No one could tell me what to do, it would be a denial of myself. If I was not true to myself, I would deny society of Bennet." Again, that hearty chuckle.

It was in Pittsburgh that he learned about Webster and other football players who died mysteriously, many of them destitute, mentally ill and bankrupt, all with the common denominator being football. It was during this period that he asked himself, "Why do you need to wear a helmet to play a game?"

After their deaths, upon examination, the brains of these men all seemed fairly normal, leading Omalu to wonder why the erratic behavior? Although he didn't know what he was looking for, he suspected football was the culprit.

When he lost his job, he found a way to take brains home with him, examining them on his kitchen and dining room tables, all the while struggling greatly with depression, a malady that began as a child as he watched the horror of war.

This is when he was finally able to make his CTE discovery. This is also when the National Football League denounced him. His fellow doctors called him a dangerous physician, saying he was disreputable.

"We Americans are infatuated with football," he said. "We all look the other way; football cannot be harmful—the evidence was denied.

"I studied death and studied death," he said. "I examined brains. There is a spirit that lives in everyone and is shared

by everybody. We are members of one another. What I do, I do for all of us. When I look at myself, I see all of us. I want the NFL to do well, but the life of one player is worth more than the NFL.”

Before he officially ended his talk, Omalu mused, “What are we afraid of? Believe that faith causes the impossible to become possible. Always dream the impossible dream. Do the autopsy.”

Omalu later moved his family west, becoming chief medical examiner for San Joaquin County and professor at UC Davis’ Department of Medical Pathology and Laboratory Medicine.

Letter: Davidson’s experience ideal for LTUSD

To the community,

Annie Davidson should be the next LTUSD school board member from trustee Area 1. Since coming to Lake Tahoe, she has jumped into the community with great energy and commitment. For example, she is an adjunct faculty member of Lake Tahoe Community College and co-teacher at Tahoe Parents Nursery School with Aileen Yure and Jennifer David. She served as a member of the Sierra House Elementary PTA board as a co-grant coordinator, classroom volunteer, and also volunteers with the Coalition for the Homeless and Warm Room Advisory Council. She led drama and music enrichment classes after school, volunteered with Marcia Sarosik’s dance program, and performs with local music groups including TOCCATA. She also serves as an AYSO soccer coach.



John Upton

She also brings experience that would be valuable to our community. Her background includes 20 years of service in education in the Northeast, Nevada, and California. She has public school teaching experience at the elementary level and has worked with pre-service teachers. She holds a bachelor's degree from Cornell University and a doctorate from University of Vermont. She has served in state government at the Nevada Department of Education and has worked for McGraw-Hill and UC Los Angeles. Currently, she works as an independent consultant with clients that have included University of Kansas and Educational Testing Service supporting state departments of education. She would bring valuable experience in education leadership to the school board.

While she have only been in the community for the past two years, you can see from the information I have provided that she has wasted no time in getting involved in a broad range of community activities. I believe that broad range of activities and contacts will make it possible for her to hear from a broad range of people in the community and that will enable her to better serve you as a school board member, if she is successful in her campaign.

Further, as you can see from her background, she has had a lot of experience in other communities in matters that are directly applicable to school board experience. I cannot tell you now whether, how, or when those experiences might be of benefit in her decision making as a school board member, but do believe that the possibility exists.

Please support Annie Davidson for LTUSD School Board member, representing Trustee Area #1.

John Upton, former LTUSD board member

UN expert: Junk food a human rights concern

By Michael Astor, AP

A U.N. expert says junk food is a human rights concern.

Hilal Elver, the U.N.'s special representative on the right to food, said the rise of industrial food production combined with trade liberalization has allowed large corporations to flood the global market with cheap, nutrient-poor foods that force poor people to choose between economic viability and nutrition, effectively violating their right to adequate food.

"Within the human rights framework, states are obliged to ensure effective measures to regulate the food industry, ensure that nutrition policymaking spaces are free from private sector influence and implement comprehensive policies that combat malnutrition in all its forms," she said.

Elver said that countries must go beyond simply ensuring their people the minimum requirements needed for survival and ensure access to food that is nutritionally adequate. She said that the international community is failing to meet globally agreed upon nutrition targets that seek to eradicate malnutrition in all its forms.

She said that while there were nearly 800 million people living in hunger around the globe, more than 2 billion people

suffer from micro-nutrient deficiency and another 600 million people are obese, meaning nearly half the world's population could be considered without access to inadequate food.

Elver said she was particularly concerned by aggressive marketing strategies to promote junk food to children and developing countries. And she called on governments to move away from industrial food systems and embrace more sustainable systems based on ecological balance.

"The first step is to recognize nutrition as an essential component of the human right to adequate food, reinforced by monitoring accountability and transparency," Elver said.

Posting ballot selfies: Personal choice or illegal act?

By Bruce Shipkowski, AP

You probably already know whether you'll vote for Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton on Election Day, leaving one important question to consider when you walk into your polling place: Is it OK to take a picture of your ballot?

While secrecy in the voting booth has become a thing of the past for those ready to share their views and daily lives on social media, laws nationwide are mixed on whether voters are allowed to take pictures of themselves in the act or of their ballots – "ballot selfies".

Federal judges have struck down bans on selfies in New Hampshire and Indiana, and rules have been changed in places

like California and Rhode Island, but in many states it's still a violation that carries potential fines or jail terms.

There are laws against sharing any photo of your ballot in 18 states, while six other states bar photography in polling places but do allow photos of mail-in ballots, according to a review by the Associated Press.

Critics say such regulations have not kept up with technology and are confusing for voters and election workers. Some states that ban ballot selfies or have moved to block them cite concerns the photos could harm the integrity of the voting process by encouraging vote-buying or coercion, though some acknowledge there's no evidence to support those fears.

Nikola Jordan, 33, of Omaha, Neb., has been taking such photos for about 10 years and believes they are a great way not only to share her views on the issues, but also to stress the importance of voting and being civically active. A Nebraska lawmaker added a provision to state election law this year to allow ballot selfies.

"I was doing this for years before I learned it was technically illegal," Jordan said with a laugh. "It's all about encouraging other people to get involved in the process, to show it can be fun and exciting to make your voice heard (at the polls). Don't think of voting as some boring thing ... It's your chance to make a difference."

The 1st Circuit Court of Appeals in Boston last month upheld a decision that New Hampshire's ban on ballot selfies was unconstitutional, saying it suppressed a large swath of political speech and there was no evidence to support the state's concerns.

"It goes to the core of democracy," said Gilles Bissonnette, legal director for the American Civil Liberties Union of New Hampshire, which brought the suit on behalf of three people investigated for violating the statute.

Among those filing briefs in support of ballot selfies was Snapchat, which argued they are the latest way voters, especially young adults, get involved in the political process and express support for or against a cause or a candidate.

“We had a failure to recognize the importance of online political speech, especially to the younger generation,” Bissonnette said. “The First Amendment needs to be guarded rigorously. These old laws cannot and should not be applied to the modern technology.”

California Gov. Jerry Brown signed a bill last month that repeals a 125-year-old law barring voters from showing people their marked ballots. It goes into effect after the November election, but legislative analysts have found no occasion of the ban being enforced – and it hasn’t stopped people from sharing photos of their 2016 ballots.

Colorado started mailing ballots this week in the all-mail presidential election, and some ballot selfies started popping up on social media. In response, Denver District Attorney Mitch Morrissey on Thursday issued a reminder that publicizing completed ballots is a misdemeanor in the state.

The ACLU criticized his statement as potential voter intimidation. Morrissey’s spokeswoman told reporters he had no plans to comb social media looking for folks posting ballot selfies, saying authorities investigate only in response to a complaint.

Virginia Attorney General Mark Herring issued a formal opinion last month that nothing in Virginia law prohibits voters from taking pictures of themselves, fellow voters or their ballot within the polling place.

“This is a product of the times we live in,” said Democratic New Jersey Assemblyman Raj Mukherji, who has sponsored a measure to allow ballot selfies. “If voters want to express their pride in participating in our democracy by voting or

tout their political preferences on social media, they should be entitled to do so.”

Clarissa Livingstone, 26, of Toms River, said she doesn’t understand concerns raised over ballot selfies. She doesn’t believe people would be influenced by seeing ballot photos that she or anyone else might post.

“People are so rigid in their political beliefs these days,” Livingstone said, “they’re not going to change their votes once they see how some Jersey girl voted.”

Contributing to this report were Associated Press writers Josh Cornfield in Trenton, Alanna Durkin Richer in Richmond, Virginia, and Kristen Wyatt in Denver.

South Shore candidates’ finance documents

Oct. 28 marked another deadline for candidates in California to file campaign financial documents.

These documents were provided by the South Lake Tahoe city clerk’s office for City Council candidates:

JoAnn Conner

Brooke Laine

Ted Long

Tami Wallace.

Here are forms for other offices provided by El Dorado County:

Annie Davidson – Lake Tahoe Unified School District

Nancy Dalton – Lake Tahoe Community College.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Calif.'s \$350 million social experiment over lawns

By Ellen Knickmeyer, AP

California water agencies that spent more than \$350 million in the last two years of drought to pay property owners to rip out water-slurping lawns are now trying to answer whether the nation's biggest lawn removal experiment was all worth the cost.

Around the state, water experts and water-district employees are employing satellite images, infrared aerial photos, neighborhood drive-bys and complex algorithms to gauge just how much grassy turf was removed. They also want to know whether the fortune in rebates helped turn California tastes lastingly away from emerald-green turf.

"How well did it work? That's really key when we're working on historic investments," said Patrick Atwater, a project manager at the California Data Collaborative, a coalition of utilities and other water-related entities grappling with the question.

Removing lawns may sound like a small, wonky step, compared to building dams. But the green turf in American yards actually stands as a worthy target for water savings, a public enemy in the eyes of many during a drought such as California's 5-year-old one.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates one-third of all water used by American households goes to watering lawns and gardens. That's 9 billion gallons of water each day – enough to supply drinking water daily for nine cities the size of New York.

In 2015, after a devastatingly dry winter, Gov. Jerry Brown ordered 25-percent water conservation by cities and towns. He mandated \$25 million in state-government spending to help cover the costs of low-income California families in particular removing their grass, and putting less-thirsty, climate-suitable plants in their yards instead.

Brown set a goal of eliminating 50 million square feet of lawn. That breaks down to less than two square miles of greenery, out of what the Public Policy Institute of California think-tank has estimated at around 1,000 square miles of watered yards statewide.

But state spending proved a drop in the bucket compared to the money local water districts put into lawn rebates.

Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, a giant water wholesaler providing water to Los Angeles and more than two dozen other cities, counties and water districts, poured just over \$300 million into lawn rebates from 2014 on, removing five square miles of lawn.

MWD doubled its rebate offer to \$2 for each square foot of lawn removed, and the lawn rebates quickly became the district's most popular program ever. Workers processed as much as \$10 million in rebate applications a week at peak. In July 2015 alone, Southern Californians applied for rebates to remove the equivalent of 1,665 front lawns.

Santa Clara Valley Water District, serving Silicon Valley, provided more than \$30 million in rebates. Dozens of other water districts put a few hundred thousand dollars to several million dollars into dead-lawn bounties. Rebates ranged from

50 cents a square foot of lawn to \$4 and up.

Water districts revised rebate rules and amounts on the fly, after controversies erupted over golf courses and other properties that got millions of dollars each in rebates. Water boards imposed caps on rebates. Some districts dictated that homeowners put in California-suitable plants. Other water agencies faced criticism for allowing artificial turf, and swathes of gravel.

Now some water-district managers are nervous over political fallout if the benefits don't measure up to the rebate costs, said Chelsea Minton of OmniEarth, a Virginia-based analytics firm that is using before-and-after satellite images to help tally the effectiveness of the lawn-removal program.

Privately, some worried water officials were "saying, 'Let's wait a year or two'" to study it, Minton said

Figuring out whether California's experiment made sense economically is more involved than just totaling how much turf residents have ripped out.

Two key questions are whether households leave the lawns off for a generation or two, and whether each rebate helps turn Californian tastes away from lawns, independent of future rebates.

At Southern California's Claremont Graduate University, Assistant Professor Andrew Marx is drawing on infrared imagery from airplanes, normally used by farmers, to help figure out whether the rebates are changing Californians' tastes.

The state will go deeper still into the number-crunching, tallying not just water savings but spin-off savings. They range from lower energy costs for piping less water to households to reduced climate-changing pollution from lawn mowers, said Ken Frame, a project manager at California's Department of Water Resources.

In Southern California's Irvine Ranch Water District, which spent \$638,403 on lawn rebates since 2014, workers sent surveys and drove block to block to nail down just how many homeowners joined the lawn-less trend.

Irvine's pilot study found that for every three homeowners who took the rebate, at least four others converted their lawns to less water-hungry plants. Water experts say other factors besides the rebates played a part, including news reports about turf removal programs and the governor's drought-messaging.

Rebates aren't about trying "to buy up all the turf in California – that wouldn't be cost-effective," said Ellen Hanak, director of the water-policy center at the Public Policy Institute of California.

Instead, the rebates have built awareness that water-thrifty landscapes also look good, Hanak said.

In Santa Rosa, homeowner Trudi Schindler took the rebate to replace deep-green grass with flagstone pavers and a silvery-green groundcover with yellow flowers. Schindler wouldn't go back to grass.

"It looks beautiful and sophisticated. And just more lovely than a lawn," she said.

AAA to host open house

AAA Carson City is hosting an open house in conjunction with the Carson City Chamber of Commerce breakfast mixer on Nov. 1.

The fall festival is slated from 9am-4pm.

The AAA branch located at 2901 S. Carson St. is the closest office to people on the South Shore.

On Tuesday there will be stations designed to inform members and prospects of the various benefits AAA has, including travel advice and how to be safe driving in winter conditions.

The office will also have product discounts, games with prizes and refreshments.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe

- The snowboard movie “Resolution” is coming to The Loft in South Lake Tahoe on Nov. 2 at 8pm. Purchase the \$10 tickets **online**.

- Magician and illusionist Rob Lake will mark his inaugural residency at Harrah’s Lake Tahoe from Dec. 22-Jan. 7.

- North Tahoe’s annual Community Thanksgiving Celebration is Nov. 24, 2-6:30pm at the North Tahoe Events Center in Kings Beach. All are welcome. Suggested meal donation: \$2 per person or \$5 per family.

- Barton’s perinatal challenges support group meets Mondays from 5:30-6:30pm at 1077B 4th St., South Lake Tahoe. All parents with perinatal mood and anxiety challenges welcome. For more information, call 530.543.5549.

A new approach to navigating the PCT

By Caroline Benner, High Country News

At exactly 583.28 miles north of the U.S.-Mexico border, along the Pacific Crest Trail, you will come upon Golden Oak Spring. Just shy of a mile later, the trail crosses a power line near a wind farm. A half-mile farther, a man named Lon Cooper, a retired information-technology professional with an enormous amount of energy, stood thinking that the spot would make a nice place to camp.

He turned the data he'd collected into a GPS application for navigating the trail, and offered it as a free download for a smartphone. Hikers who use the so-called Halfmile app can now know exactly where they are on the Pacific Crest Trail, or how far away from the trail they are if they have wandered off it.

This sort of hyper-detailed, micro-documenting of the trails of the West – the Arizona Trail and the Colorado Trail have similar apps, for example – is a new trend in backcountry exploration. But before downloading these guides, consider whether you really want or need to know all the precise details that these wilderness apps offer.

[Read the whole story](#)

Reading fund established in

LTUSD's teacher's name



John Nemes

A special fund has been established with Soroptimist International of Tahoe Sierra in the name of John Nemes.

Nemes was a long-time elementary school teacher in the Lake Tahoe Unified School District who died Oct. 2.

More than anything, he encouraged children to read by not only teaching reading, but by giving away many books.

The service club gives all children in grades K-3 on the South Shore one book as part of the summer reading program. In Nemes' name they'd like to give each student two books.

To contribute, send checks to: SITS, PO Box 18727, South Lake Tahoe, CA 96151.