

## **Unsociable Game – Episode 01 – “The Hit”**

### **Music (Tourist Kid) (Intro Theme)**

A repetitive, mournful synthesiser loop, with heavy bass intonation at the end.

### **Ben Rodin**

This is Unsociable Game – A podcast about concussion and community football. I’m Ben Rodin.

### **Music (Tourist Kid)**

Score fades to silence.

### **Ambience (Fades In)**

Park and Football ground sounds, trees blowing, birds chirping, mild chatter.

### **Sound Effect (Fades In)**

An Ambulance’s Wahs are heard as if distant and low in the mix.

### **(Sound Effect Slow Fades Out)**

### **Ben Rodin (Voice Hurried, Rushed)**

Is that for me? I don’t know where I am. The grass is very green, I can kind of see a few clouds, but the glare feels sharp. It’s painful, but I see some guys in black and white jumpers running over in a circle and some other people, kicking goals through the big sticks with the Sherrin.

### **Music (Daniel Burch) (Slow Fade In, Aggressive build up over 30 to 40 seconds)**

Repetitive, 80’s film/Drive styled synthesisers, slightly foreboding.

### **Ben Rodin**

I think I’m with the guys in the black and white stripes, but I’m not too sure. Yes, yes I am with those guys. I know I’m cooked, whatever has happened.

**Sound Effect:** The sound of neck straining to move, a bit like a crack, or half-a-crack.

### **Ben Rodin**

I can’t move my neck, it’s in a brace, I can only look upwards. I’m concussed, they said.

I didn’t yet know that I would eventually become one of four players at my club, West Brunswick, who, by the end of the 2017 season, were unable to play further football because of a history of multiple concussions. This was my sixth knock in five years, including three in 2015.

This series will tell the stories of those players, just four of the 1.5 million who play Australian rules football each year.

It will look at recovery, whether you should or shouldn’t play after a knock, how concussion is affecting the emerging women’s leagues across the country, and finally, ask just how dangerous is this game and what’s the AFL doing about it?

## **Music and Ambience (Fade Out)**

### **Ben Rodin**

But first, we should probably ask a deceptively straightforward question: What happens when you get hit in the head? Let's talk to Will.

### **Ambience (Fade In)**

Football sounds at a men's amateur game.

### **Will Stubbings**

I am Will Stubbings.

I first had a concussion when I was sixteen. They put me up to play with the year 11's and 12's. Got the ball, and a player just tackled me when I didn't have the ball, and sort of threw me backwards and I hit the back of my head on the ground.

Got straight back up, took the free kick, ran around for about 30 seconds. And then apparently I just stood there, sort of wandering around for a little while. And then the quarter time siren went, and I ran in everyone else, or half-time siren went.. and yeah.

### **(Ambience Fades Out)**

### **Will Stubbings**

It was sort of, it was like waking up from a dream, when I was in the change rooms, going, "Where am I? What have I done? What are you guys doing here? Why am I covered in mud?"

### **Ben Rodin**

However, with his most recent hit, in 2017, while the experience was similar, the details were slightly different.

### **Ambience (Fades In)**

Football sounds at a men's amateur game.

### **Will Stubbings**

I received a head knock, I got up, this time I knew that something wasn't right, so I ran immediately off the ground, umm, and the coach goes, "You alright, you alright?" I go "Yeah yeah, no worries, I'll be fine, umm, just knocked the wind out of me," so I sit down, and then I sort of don't remember too much about what happened after that, I remember, sort of, again, feeling like...

### **(Ambience Fades Out)**

### **Will Stubbings**

...I've woken up about ten minutes later, and just not knowing where I was or what I was doing or how I got there, or anything like that, which was uncomfortable.

### **Ben Rodin**

By contrast for another West Brunswick player, his most recent hit came in the final game of the year.

### **Sam Fleming**

I'm Sam Fleming. It was a bit of a silly incident, I had no idea how it happened....

### **Ambience (Fades In)**

Football sounds at a men's amateur game.

### **Sam Fleming**

...because I, my recollection after the game, was that the ball, I didn't think the ball was anywhere near us, what I remembered, was, well tried to remember was, there was a moment of impact, where I thought I was away from the ball, and then I woke up, and then I just remembered being dragged up off the ground, and sitting down being really cold.

### **(Ambience Fades Out)**

### **Ben Rodin**

It is also worth noting though, that this wasn't Sam's first concussion.

### **Sam Fleming**

Well, I think it's about, I think it's eight, I think it's about eight, but well, eight sort of streak moments, three of those being knockouts, I think, three or four.

Green streaks was just a term I coined for it because that's what happened with each of mine. That was the common theme amongst them, was that, and they were of different levels, I'd have moments where I get green flashes and streaks across my eyes and I'd be like, "Well, oh yeah, well okay, I've been concussed."

### **Ben Rodin**

Professor John Olver, director of the Epworth Rehabilitation Centre for Concussion and Mild Brain Trauma, who presents annually to Amateur clubs in Victoria, says the presentation of concussion can differ from person to person, but often will be caused by similar circumstances.

### **Professor John Olver**

Well The brain in the living organism, is fairly soft, people describe it as jelly-like and any blow to the head, the brain gets shaken around.

Whilst about a third of the cases can have loss of consciousness, you don't get a lot of persisting amnesia after concussion, it can be for a very short time. And the symptoms as I say, eighty-five percent of people with concussion, their symptoms actually resolve within two weeks.

Most concussion patients; they don't have loss of consciousness, they don't have anything to see on CT scan, they've got a history of a blow to the head, their brain's clearly been decelerated and shaken up, and they have a series of symptoms uhh, which are identified as post-concussion symptoms.

## **Ben Rodin**

However, the question of whether the way players compete increases risk of knocks, is less clear.

A 2016 survey by Federation University revealed that several community players were willing to deceive trainers, ignore medical advice and put team success ahead of their own health. While this is obviously a terrifying prospect, there is also way a player plays – that is, how they position themselves, the way they attack the ball, and so on, that needs to be considered.

For his part, Professor Olver believes that while the hits that a player takes are unremarkable, ultimately the way a player chooses to play can contribute to receiving multiple hits to the head.

## **Professor John Olver**

People that do have repetitive concussions, the way they play the game is probably, whether it's more aggressive, whether they put their head into a tackle, more risk-taking behaviour than other footballers, there seems to be a pattern of their play that leads to their heads being more vulnerable to be, to be struck.

## **Music (Tourist Kid)**

A repetitive motif, jittery ambivalent synthesizers that sound as if they are slightly underwater.

## **Ben Rodin**

While there are different opinions across the board, the consensus is an average of one concussion per player per year over multiple seasons generally constitutes an abnormally large amount of impacts. By contrast, the elite men's league in the AFL considers one concussion per team of twenty two, every three games, an average occurrence.

This is somewhat concerning, given that there have been twenty-eight concussions in less than ninety elite men's games this year, with one hundred games left in the season and this so far, all falls within the baseline average. However, apply the baseline across all levels of football - community, amateur, junior - and the chance of several players getting hit more than once, is dramatically high.

## **Music (Tourist Kid)**

Music fades out slowly.

Speaking to Sam and Will, who were both inside midfielders, the most contested and intense role on the field, and knowing my own history as a player who liked to tackle and do tough things, it is undoubtedly true we liked to be in the middle of ball spillages and contests – and we probably have to admit we've put ourselves at greater risk of head knocks.

## **Will Stubbings**

I used to have a little mantra in my head that was: "You gotta get to the next contest, 'cos if you're not there, you're not going to do anything. You like, you can't influence the game." I used to say that in my head a lot. And it worked! I played quite good footy in my younger days, I won a club best and fairest, and a league best and fairest.

**Sam Fleming**

I respect guys in the backline, but I've never wanted to be part of it. I like playing forward, and I like playing on ball. So yeah, I've always been in a small man's spot.

I think over time that position suited my natural progression of the game. So I was never a great runner or I didn't have great endurance, and I wasn't overly fast, so outside of the contest was never a huge strength, I think inside I was able to use things like clean hands with first use of the ball, or finding teammates or being able to create space and time, just with the way I moved.

So it was always just the natural spot for me to play.

**Music (Tourist Kid) (Exit Theme) (Slow Fade In)**

Piano melody anchored, with intervening bursts of digital noise and and feedback. Small amount of reverb and echo. Feeling and mood is melancholic but again, slightly ambivalent – it isn't telling you how to feel.

**Ben Rodin**

However, as we'll find out next time, when we look at the well-being of players in the days and weeks after a concussion, sometimes playing a certain way can create a series of unintended consequences.

This is Unsociable Game. I'm Ben Rodin and thanks for listening.

**Music (Tourist Kid)**

Music fade up and then out gradually.