

## **Unsociable Game – Episode 02 – “Out of the Dark”**

### **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.

### **Ben Rodin**

Last week, we looked at the experience and sensation of a knock to the head on a footy oval, with Sam Fleming, Will Stubbings and myself all recounting our experiences. But what happens when those symptoms just don’t disappear, but linger?

What happens when two to three days of headaches turn into two or three weeks of recurring symptoms?

### **Sam Fleming**

I just didn’t want any light to come in, because it was really difficult to look at any sort of, have any light on me, or look at any sort of moving images, I wouldn’t have the TV on or anything like that.

### **Ben Rodin**

When Sam was hit in the grand final, and started dealing with his symptoms, he faced a number of situations that were different from the norm for him, including sleep.

### **Sam Fleming**

On the Monday, I think I slept, which is, I don’t know if you’re meant to or not, I slept from, I went to bed on the Sunday night at eight o’clock, and woke up at ten am, and then went back to bed at one, and woke up at seven, and went back to bed at ten.

### **Ben Rodin**

And sometimes, there were unexpected occurrences in parts of the body that Sam previously didn’t think could occur.

### **Sam Fleming**

Interestingly about mine, is that on a lot of occasions I’ve been hit sort of on the right side of the head. I’ve had a lot of follow up issues with the left side of my body which has been really interesting.

So you know, my first run back from a concussion when I’ve been hit on the right side of my head, I’d get quite tight in my hamstring and calf on my left leg, no matter how much I stretch, and that’s been common through the last few particularly because it’s all happened around that side of my head.

### **Ben Rodin**

While sometimes a super heavy knock like Sam's might take a few weeks to resolve, there are other cases, especially at the elite level with players like Meg Downie, Koby Stevens and Angus Brayshaw sometimes taking several months, before being allowed to return to play, with others like Brisbane's Justin Clarke, ultimately having to retire.

Professor John Olver of the Epworth Rehabilitation Clinic says that it is impossible to know how long a patient's symptoms take to resolve based solely on its presentation.

### **Professor John Olver**

It's again very difficult, when you first see a patient, you actually don't know how long their concussion is, their symptoms are going to take to resolve. And the scans that help us judge the severity of injury and more severe traumatic brain injury are all normal usually, so you don't get any clue from that.

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

Ambient drone, with light hi-hat hits and noise. Slightly curious, questioning.

### **Ben Rodin**

Professor Olver's description of the follow up process made me wonder about the the footballers who self-monitor their injury.

I had five concussions between 2012 and 2017, each triggered by varying things. Sometimes these episodes were delayed; as in, I'd play out a game with no symptoms then start feeling dizzy in the game's aftermath, with fluctuating concentration levels throughout the working week. I never saw a doctor for these symptoms until after I got knocked out.

In one game, a semi-final, I got hit in the head twice, both in the same quarter,

I drove home dizzy and heady, and I couldn't concentrate for the following week. At training I felt adrift, and to be honest, I left it until the following Sunday, only hours before a preliminary final, to work out if I was okay to play. I was, barely.

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

(Fades Out)

For Will Stubbings, despite only having two concussions in his playing career – The second time was significantly worse than the first.

### **Will Stubbings**

So the second time I had a concussion, in total I think I missed about a month of football. It wasn't so much, it wasn't so much any pain, it was just sort of a sense that I wasn't right; like I couldn't think clearly. I think I suffered a bit of whiplash as well, so my neck was quite sore. The muscles in my neck were tensing up, that was giving me headaches; it was also affecting my vision.

### **Ben Rodin**

Then it started intruding on his work life, which is also something that happened to me.

### **Will Stubbings**

I went back to work on the Monday, tried to work through Monday, Tuesday, found that I couldn't concentrate. Normally I try to be productive as I can, I try to get a lot done and I found myself just staring at the computer, couldn't read or couldn't continuously read documents or anything like that, so I went to the doctor on Wednesday, and took the rest of the week off. And again I'm not sure if that was related to the concussion or the whiplash, or, yeah I guess I'm not 100 per cent sure.

I wasn't good for about almost three weeks I'd say, and then I let myself have another week, just to be make sure that I was okay. And I do remember that first training session going, I'm still not 100 per cent right here, like I'm still a little bit blurry when the ball is coming to me, when I put in a couple of long efforts, I could feel a bit of pain in the back of my neck, so I remember, I think I cut that first training session short.

### **Ben Rodin**

I've wondered sometimes about the toll that this takes on the mind, when your body just can't do the things that you want it to, and you have nothing to do but wait for it to get better, not knowing when that will happen.

Professor Olver, for his part, believes there's often an unforeseen psychological factor to consider with concussion symptoms.

### **Professor John Olver**

There's always with symptoms, the symptoms from the original injury and then the psychological reaction that they have for months after. And some of the people that don't do as well, that psychological reaction can continue to enhance the symptoms as time goes on, where as other people that don't have as much of a reaction, their symptoms can get better a lot more quickly.

So it's not just the injury, it's the person, it's their pre-morbid history, and it's how they've coped with their symptoms and how the symptoms have changed their lifestyle so that adds another thing that makes it difficult to predict on the initial assessment how people are going to go.

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

Bass Drum with bells sounds and a very faint noise linking them together. Foreboding but not necessarily giving away in the text.

### **Ben Rodin**

It's been three weeks since I got hit in the head, as I described in the first episode, and I am still not back to my normal self.

I still hadn't progressed beyond straight-line running and exercise that didn't involve multiple multiple changes of direction. I felt okay doing this stuff, but as soon as I added a bit of cognitive difficulty, I couldn't really cope. I felt trapped and limited by my body. It was frightening to say the least.

Next time, we look at a big decision – Do you keep playing football despite the risk of ongoing damage?

This is Unsociable Game, a podcast about community football and concussion. I'm Ben

Rodin and thanks for listening.

**Music (Tourist Kid)**

An electronic bass drum thuds and ends the episode.