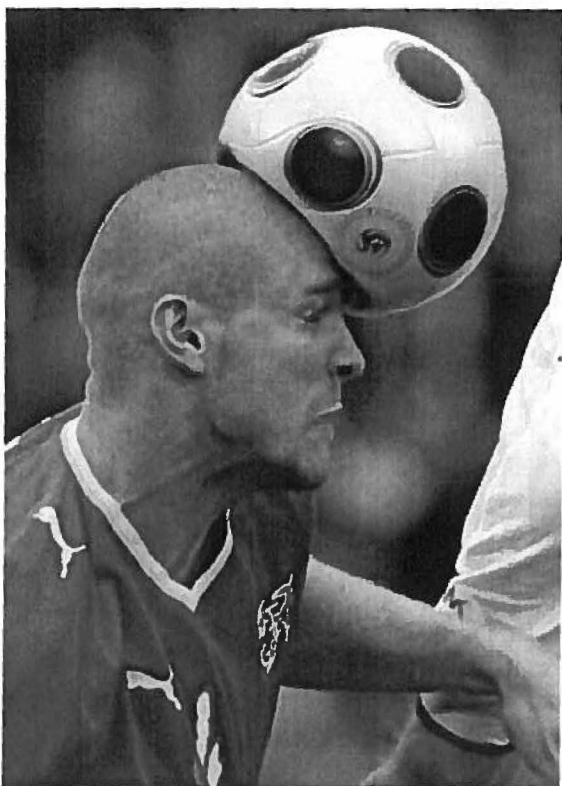




Health

Not on my head, son

Doctors want ban over brain fears



Is he heading for trouble? ... Fulham's Philippe Senderos in action

CHILD footballers should be banned from heading the ball because it damages the brain, a study has claimed.

Experts said youngsters' brains are still developing and regularly heading can kill cells.

They estimated that heading the ball 1,000 times — easily achieved in childhood — led to untreatable damage.

The study was carried out by a team of neurological doctors in the US who looked at the brains of 38 amateur footballers aged 30 who had played the game since early childhood. They were asked to estimate the number of headers they had made since they began playing. They were then given a scan to search for damage.

Those who had frequently headed a ball were found to have suffered some degree of injury. Five areas in the frontal lobe and the bottom rear of the brain were affected.

They are responsible for attention, memory, and visual ability. In a separate study the same group of players was given a test to assess brain function. Those with the most heading performed worse for verbal memory and speed tests using hand-eye co-ordination.

New guidelines for parents, schools and sports clubs may now be introduced, although no age was given to indicate when the brain was developed enough to prevent damage.

A spokesman for the study, by the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York, said: "These studies present compelling evidence brain injury can result from heading."



Fears ... study claims kids may be at risk, left, and tragic Jeff Astle died from brain damage, right

In 2002, a coroner linked heading the ball to the death of England and West Brom legend Jeff Astle, 59.

It was ruled he died from brain damage caused by "industrial injury".

The Football Association last night said it is monitoring the claims, but stressed balls are now lighter than they were.

A spokesman for Headway, the brain injury association, said: "The research team only studied 38 players, and we would be very wary of drawing any meaningful conclusions from a study with such a small sample size."

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