

SPORTS

FINGER LAKES TIMES
THURSDAY, APRIL 7, 2011

COMING FRIDAY

Reports on area high school baseball and softball teams, many of whom are expected to play their season openers today

SECTION B

LOOKING FOR GAIN FROM A LIFETIME OF PAIN

Boxing concussed Ray Ciancaglini's brain more than he knew, and he wants young athletes to avoid his fate

By **CHRIS MARQUART**
FINGER LAKES TIMES

VARICK — Ray Ciancaglini can look at his trophy case and tell you incredible stories from his boxing career, even though he might not remember your name. He can hand you medals, awards and newspaper clippings, even though his hands shake from uncontrollable tremors.

Ciancaglini suffers from pugilistic dementia, leaving him alternately confused, forgetful and trembling with Parkinson's Syndrome-like shudders. It's the lasting mark of his star-crossed time in the ring, the result of layered head injuries that accumulated before the initial one had healed.

Now, 40 years after he left boxing behind, Ciancaglini is stepping into a new ring. He's trying to spread the word and fight back against the dis-



Ciancaglini

order that has so deeply affected his life.

Ciancaglini has founded a website, "The Second Impact," at www.thesecondimpact.com. With the assistance of Dr. Jason Feinberg, the Varick resident is visiting local schools and talking with athletes. Not only is he addressing the severity of his own concussions, Ciancaglini is stressing the importance of treating the initial head injury and making sure it is fully healed before going back to the playing field.

"The game you sit out today could be the career you save tomorrow," Ciancaglini says. "All my life, in boxing, the old-timers at Singer's Gym told me to gut it up, to

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Submitted photo

Ray Ciancaglini was dubbed "The Paladin Kid" during his time in the ring. This picture is on the home page of TheSecondImpact.com, a Ciancaglini-founded portal devoted to concussion awareness.

Nozzolio co-sponsors a bill aimed at concussions

By **CHRIS MARQUART**
FINGER LAKES TIMES

VARICK — From the beginning, Ray Ciancaglini's vision was to take "Second Impact" beyond the Finger Lakes region.

Already, his message is being heard in Albany.

Sen. Michael Nozzolio, R-54 of Fayette, is among a group of six state senators sponsoring a bill (S.3953) to help Ciancaglini's initiative reach athletes and coaching staffs throughout New York.

The legislation would require all athletes participating in activities sanctioned by the New York State Public High School Athletic Association to forgo any athletic activities for a minimum of 24 hours after a concussion is diagnosed.

"Ray is an outstanding

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Varsity Club

Finger Lakes Times sports writer Joshua DeSain takes a closer look at the growing awareness of the concussion problem in high school sports on Page 2B. Geneva High School plans to have all its coaches certified in concussion recognition by the fall season, and Palmyra-Macedon has implemented protocols to help identify when blows to the head are severe enough to sideline an athlete.

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tough it out ... and look what it got me."

Ciancaglioni has been trying to get his program off the ground for two years, finally launching his website last month. His wife, Patti, helps Ray maintain a Facebook page.

"I know Ray has been trying to start this and get through to people, and it is starting to work," said DeSales Athletic Director Ron Passalacqua. "People are listening. They are starting to become aware of the serious problems that can come with an injury of the brain."

"Ray is doing a wonderful thing to alert people and tell them how to look for the signs and prevent further damage."

Ciancaglioni said the response has been huge.

"I was confident we could do this, but it's still amazing to me," he said with a hint of disbelief. "We have so much support, and so many people are stepping forward for the cause."

Ciancaglioni will speak with the Hobart College football team during its preseason training in August. He'll interact with DeSales athletes during a school-wide assembly May 11. He is booked for the Romulus Central School fall sports meeting Aug. 14.

Feinberg said Ciancaglioni's personal experiences make his message that much more important.

"Ray's situation is different," explained Feinberg, who treated Ciancaglioni for six years along with Dr. Heidi Schwarz, a neurologist. "Boxers have their own dementia — it's people who basically got pummeled — but Ray has that awareness."

"There are more kids playing sports that get concussions than kids that are boxing. He wanted to help increase awareness and educate athletes so (they) don't end up with the syndrome."

According to Feinberg, the brain and nervous systems are developed during adolescence. A teenager's sense of invincibility and desire to play can lead to greater problems.

"You don't get a second-impact injury if you take care of the first one," Feinberg said. "Ray can show it sometimes: He can't think or his balance is off. He wanted me there to support him. People might ask medical questions, and he wants to have validation."

"Ray has his story, but he's got the medical staff with him to really back up what he's saying," Passalacqua said. "I've known Ray a long time, and anyone who falls and has a head injury should know about this. The concussion problem in sports — pro, high school or col-

lege — is a hot issue, and Ray is a living example of what can occur or happen if you don't take care of it and look out for the signs."

Romulus Athletic Director and Geneva football coach Mike Pane agrees.

"We think the angle Ray is coming from will be effective and will benefit the kids, parents and coaches," he said.

Mike Cragg met Ciancaglioni years ago at Smaldone's newsstand. He knew some of Ciancaglioni's story. As Hobart football head coach, Cragg knows the danger of head injuries.

"I thought it would be great for all players not only to meet Ray and know his story but also to hear the message behind his story," Cragg said. "Maybe for some of them, it will help with the decision on what or how much to say to a trainer or a coach."

Cragg has been helping with Hobart and William Smith Colleges' preconcussion testing. Keeping a "baseline score" helps trainers gauge or measure the recovery progress of a student-athlete. Often, a student-athlete might feel ready to compete, but the numbers tell a different story.

"Preseason tests and testing after they get (a concussion) ... we are doing the right things," Cragg said. "But to have someone who has lived through it and coming back too soon and the damage it can do and the effects it can have is a powerful statement."

"Look at me," Ciancaglioni said. "This whole thing was preventable, but I didn't take it seriously then. My mother watched me destroy my noggin. She begged me to stop, but I was too hard-headed to listen. I don't want another parent to watch their child go through this."

The website discusses common symptoms and warning signs of a concussion. It offers excuses athletes might make in order to play. It offers common warning signs of concussions and has links to medical articles on the subject.

Ciancaglioni said it's important to realize an athlete doesn't have to be knocked unconscious to suffer a concussion. He was never knocked down or out, so the thought of a concussion never crossed his mind.

He urged any athlete that might have suffered one to come forward.

"A student who is not honest about their injuries or conditions is a student at risk," Ciancaglioni said. "I hope people use this website and the tools on it to do their job more effectively."

"We implemented baseline testing at Romulus last year," Pane said. "We think Ray coming here is a

good next step to come in and talk to the kids about the importance of being honest with the coaches and parents. There is no good in hiding anything."

That, Ciancaglioni admitted, became his own undoing.

In the late 1960s, he was building a fine Golden Gloves résumé. Monsignor Franklin Kelliher, a Buffalo-area Roman Catholic priest, met Ciancaglioni while he trained in Buffalo in 1968. Kelliher dubbed Ciancaglioni "The Paladin Kid."

"I'd go anywhere and do almost anything to fight. I loved being in the ring," Ciancaglioni remembered. "Monsignor would say I was just like the hired gunman in the 1960s TV show, 'Have Gun, Will Travel.' He said I was a gentleman, willing to travel long distances and taking on any fight even on short notice. The nickname stuck."

Ciancaglioni suffered his first head injury in 1969. Between rounds, he vomited into his corner bucket. He finished the fight, winning by split decision.

He remembers the aftermath all too well.

"For days I slept and slept," Ciancaglioni said. "I had this ringing in my ears, I had a constant headache and I couldn't hear a thing, but the old-timers at Singer's kept saying, 'Tough it out.' I didn't want to be looked at as weak, so I kept on going. "Monsignor even told me once I had the heart of a lion, but the head of a jack-ass."

He guzzled Pepto Bismol to control his nausea and swallowed aspirin like candy to control headaches. Ciancaglioni remembers when Olympic Trials finalist Rocky Cudney caught him with a shot to the head, another of his concussions. Another time, Ciancaglioni had ingested so much aspirin his corner people couldn't stop a gash over his eye from bleeding uncontrollably.

"I think, overall, maybe three or four times I fought with a concussion and got another one on top of it before it healed," Ciancaglioni said. "It only takes a few times before you can get yourself in really, really bad shape."

Ciancaglioni quit boxing in 1972. The damage was irreparable, though only in recent years has he begun to understand the toll all those bouts took.

"If we can get to the kids, and make them aware and help the coaching staff become aware, we can make a difference," Ciancaglioni concluded.

Ciancaglioni is available to meet individually with student-athletes. Contact him through his website.

Online
www.thesecondimpact.com

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contributor to our community. He cares a lot about fostering athletic competition, but there is a growing phenomenon across the nation," Nozzolio said, referring to concussions and the severity of second-impact injuries. "There needs to be additional rules by the state health and education departments to ensure New York is at the forefront of protecting student-athletes."

"This is such a huge step for what we're trying to do," Ciancaglioni said. "To have someone at the state level who understands what we're going for to support us, I couldn't be happier."

In a letter to Ciancaglioni last month, Nozzolio wrote that "concussion symptoms often take time to surface, and this legislation will allow for a more thorough evaluation of the young athlete's conditions."

If S.3953 becomes law, students would not be allowed to participate in athletics for at least 24 hours following a blow to the head, even if a trainer or physician has cleared an athlete. A blow to the head would be defined using current medical standards established within professional and college athletics, and by various centers for disease control.

"It's up to the State Health Department to gather that and form regulations," Nozzolio said. "Legislation will likely have little impact on club sports or recreational programs, but the hope is the pending state policy will be adopted by organizers of those programs."

"We're not trying to prevent play or stop anything. We are trying to make it safer."

Nozzolio said there is no clear indication when the bill's fate will be decided. He said the proposal likely will be tweaked by the state Senate's health and education committees.

Ciancaglioni is confident of its outcome.

"If we truly are putting the best interest of the kids on the front burner, then there's no reason that I can see why this won't go through," Ciancaglioni added. "It's for the kids. I don't want any of them to miss out on reaching their full potential tomorrow because they were too stubborn or proud today."