

# World of concussions impacting potential pro athletes

By Jim Trotter, Sports Illustrated

Stanford wideout/returner Chris Owusu has a sprinter's speed and a bodybuilder's physique. He also has a medical report that makes NFL teams wince.

The 6-foot, 196-pound senior had his final season cut short last November, when he sustained his second concussion in three weeks and third in 13 months. He was asymptomatic within days of each concussion, but the Cardinal did not clear him to play in the Fiesta Bowl or the Senior Bowl. Since then he has been medically cleared by two doctors, including at the annual Scouting Combine in February. But that has not allayed concerns among some NFL personnel men.

"He's off our board," says one general manager. "He was from the start. It wouldn't matter if he was RG3, he'd still be off our board. With that kind of history it's not worth the risk of him being seriously injured, especially with all the attention you're going to receive. If you draft him you're going to be under the microscope the whole time. Every time he gets hit it's going to be magnified tenfold."

Owusu's combination of medical risk and athletic talent makes him the most intriguing prospect in this year's draft. He is entering the league at a time when more than 1,000 former and current players are plaintiffs in 59 lawsuits against the league – including at least 15 class-action suits – that claim the NFL failed to adequately treat and educate players about the possible long-term consequences of brain trauma. Just last week Ray Easterling, a safety with the Falcons in the 1970s, shot himself to death after years of struggling with

depression and dementia, his wife said. Fourteen months earlier, former Bears and Giants safety Dave Duerson committed suicide, after which it was learned he was suffering from chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), a degenerative brain disease.

It is against that backdrop that Owusu is entering the NFL. One general manager says he has third-round talent, but gave him a seventh-round grade because of the concussions. Most executives view him as a value pick, meaning he has too much talent to pass on altogether but will only use a late-round selection on him.

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