



NFL Player Shares A Real CTE Story (Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy)

Cheng Ruan, MD
with **Jonas Crafts**



Cheng Ruan, MD

Everybody around here and I'm with my good friend Jonas and Jonas was on the Philadelphia eagles. And we really bonded through one major element, which is concussive injuries and traumatic brain injuries. So Jonas wants to kinda introduce yourself and tell us the story with that.

Jonas Crafts

Yeah. Hey guys, make sure having me on, my name is Jonas Crafts. I was tied in with the Philadelphia Eagles and you know, we started talking about brain traumas and when I met you what, 34 years ago now? And you know, my dad played professional football as well and with Denver Broncos. About eight years ago now my dad kind of just went berserk one week, there was just stuff wasn't right. It wasn't adding up. My mom's calling me. She's like, Hey, your dad stood outside the shower for 45 minutes while I was washing my hair. The next day my dad gets a big legal pad and he's writing trying to write my mom a letter because he didn't know what to say, he couldn't complete a sentence. Everything was in capital letters scratched out, capital letters scratched out and she's like, your dad's acting really weird. My dad was just a fun funny guy. The next morning it's 5am-ish. My phone starts vibrating. I reach over. I look and I see mom and dad kind of just turn it off because I'm halfway asleep.

What calls again at that point in time, I'm like, oh crap, why are they calling right now. So I answered my mom, bawling and crying. I'm like, okay, something's wrong. She goes, your dad's going to get out of the house before he hurts me, okay, where are you going? I'm going, your sister. And I was like, I'll meet you there, but call an ambulance, call somebody. Obviously something's not right. I mean my mom, my sisters, we go to the house, we go to my mom's house. Finally, as we pull up, we see the ambulance, we see fire department out there. And I said, hey, who's in charge? That's my dad. The chief came over and he goes, well, here's what happened. You know, we knocked on the door, we got the call for distress from your mom. We



knocked on the door when your dad answered the door. He had a knife in one hand, a bottle of Tequila in the other. But as soon as he saw us, he dropped them both so we knew it was a cry for help. They had him that they kind of cuffed him. So he was in the back of the ambulance when I pulled up and it's just, if you've ever been concussed, you know what it looks like? I mean, he's looking 20 yards past you. You know, he's not focused on you. He's focused 20 yards past and he's just shaking. He sees me and that's that, that's all you can do is kind of hold my hand and he's just shaking and he just looks scared as all get out.

Cheng Ruan, MD

But did you know what was happening at the time?

Jonas Crafts

Absolutely not. No clue. I mean, again, this is eight years ago, I think CTE kind of just came out, you know, Junior say I was maybe a couple years before that this wasn't something that we knew. I mean, my dad was 70 or 69 at the time. Yeah. You know, And so he was relatively young and it's like, what the heck is going on? So what was going through your head at that particular time? Gosh, it's just, you know, what is this? How do we fix it? How did it happen as well? I mean, it was like how did this happen and how do we fix it? And that again, he was young enough that I was like, oh, he'll be fine. You know? And that's what I'm kind of thinking like, okay, something is wrong. So, you know, we take him over, get him checked out and sure enough to dot you know, as they did. I believe it was a cat scan or something.

He said, yeah. You know that he has vascular dementia. All the minute arteries leading up to the back of the brain had hardened and died off. We in the football realm call that more than likely C. T. Right? You couldn't can't necessarily diagnosed it unless you cut the actual brain open and see everything. But we knew that the brain wasn't getting the oxygen, wasn't getting the blood flow that it needed and how those minute arteries leading up to the brain hardened and pretty much shut off when the rest of his plumbing, his heart, his cholesterol and blood pressure, everything. The doctor goes, he's 35 years old, he's not a seven year old guy, he's 35 years old. So...

Cheng Ruan, MD

Just by looking at the cleaner arteries in the heart. Okay.

Jonas Crafts

I said, yeah, all the plumbing and electrical is great here. Why isn't it going up to the brain?



Cheng Ruan, MD

So vascular dementia mostly is people with other vascular issues, like in the heart of the carotid arteries, but his was so obviously something was causing this, that's outside of the standard of norm, which we now know, you know, eight years later, that is one of the hallmarks of chronic traumatic encephalopathy or CTE. And so how long was it after that that you thought, hey, maybe this is from like repetitive trauma.

Jonas Crafts

Pretty much as soon as they told us that the next day, so we know what it's from, because when he goes, the arteries are clean, you know, it was like, okay, we know it's from it's from pounding heads and if you knew my dad when I was getting recruited into college, I get because he played ball, he was a coach also. So, you know, growing up, all his friends were coaches of teams. So me getting recruited, half of those coaches would come and go Jonas if you're, if you're 1/10 is mean, is your daddy, they're gonna be a hell of a ballplayer. My dad was just that mean, my dad was just, you know, there was no quit, there was no stop and so you know, to have that and it's like man, just to know how he played, he played all out and that's how we play as professional athletes. It's all or nothing rarely is it. Oh, let me protect myself now. I think we're kind of getting to that realm of should I make that extra hit or should I go out of balance, you know? And so as we see that I go, okay, we knew exactly what this is from just because he was an all in type of guy.

Cheng Ruan, MD

Did that make you fearful for yourself if you were going to go under the same thing?

Jonas Crafts

So funny enough or ironically enough he gets sick in October.

Cheng Ruan, MD

Yeah.

Jonas Crafts

Of 2011, I met with one of the doctors because I was doing diabetic nutrition in San Antonio. I met with one of the doctors in December of 2011 and that's when he goes Jonas, you know, so much, you know, so many people, why don't you open up a medical clinic? I'll be your medical director. He told me that in December of 2011 I opened up my medical clinic in March of 2012 and I did that. It was almost like because I was scared and I was like hold on, some of these pieces to



the puzzle are falling in place, how do I, I always wanted to be like my dad, but how do I not end up like my dad? And so that was to me was like hey how can I fix this, I'm young enough, I was 30 years old, 31 years old and I said how do I fix this? So that way I don't end up at his shoes and I was kind of looking for answers the whole way of saying, hey I'm young enough, my brain, I believe is still pliable enough that I can create that neurogenesis within the brain, so I don't end up another CTE victim from the NFL.

Cheng Ruan, MD

And so when you open that up and obviously now that's a very personal reason why you open that up, right? And so what is your mission now when it comes to C. T. E.

Jonas Crafts

Oh my gosh, it's educate those that have already played because again our brains are still good, as long as they're still good and that's what you know, we saw with the study educate the former athletes because the former athletes are going to talk to the current athletes and the current athletes are going to talk to the future athletes meaning high school middle school pee, wee football, these guys are still hitting hard and as they're growing, I believe, I mean from the 88 year olds to the 18 year olds, that's where the brain is really growing robust and it's going okay, You know what? We can talk about helmets all day long, we can talk about, you know, safety and hitting up, they're still gonna be accidents. If you look at, you know, to talk about, you know, he gets thrown down, he didn't get hit, he got thrown down, hitting a human, there's a little bit of pliability there, hitting the ground. That thing doesn't move and that's what rattles the brain.

And so we go, you can have all the science, but what if we could feed the brain every time after we play, you know, and what us athletes get after a football game, it's always simple carbohydrates, pizza, spaghetti wings, and what do we like to do? We like to celebrate what else we put out alcohol? So there you go, okay, I'm having alcohol, I'm having simple carbs or any of those good for the brain. No, so this, to me, is a big education piece for the universities, for the school districts, Yeah, school districts. And also that way they can start going, hey, you know what, we know that, you know, on average about 70 to 80 offensive plays. So every time if I'm a lineman, but I'm a tight end, which I was, you know, out of those 70 plays, I'm probably hitting somebody at least 60 just during the game, not to mention during the daily week of practice. You were button up or button up, you're taking steps that way you can have it. I would say minimum 100 times a day. Our brains are doing this. What are we doing to help feed and re nourish the brain after? Right? As athletes, we go and work out at the gym where you can talk to every athlete, they're more than likely going to take a pre workout and unlikely to have a protein. So amino acids, everything. So that way we can help the muscle, right? So when we go to the

DRTALKS.COM/REVERSEBRAINDISORDERS-2022

DISCLAIMER: This transcript was generated using artificial intelligence and may contain typographical errors. If you have questions, suggestions, or corrections, feel free to contact us at support@drtalks.com



gym we're creating chaos in the muscle. But we utilize all those supplements so that way we can help repair the body. Okay now if we're creating chaos in the brain, can we utilize nutrients just like that? Like some new tropics of C. B. D. S. Some good things to help the brain heal itself, just like the muscles can heal themselves?

Cheng Ruan, MD

Yeah and the answer is yes.

Jonas Crafts

Correct.

Cheng Ruan, MD

And so let's talk about the study and and the study that we're referring to is one that I was part of the publication where enter cannabinoids. So cannabinoids form of CBD and other forms of cannabinoids. What did it really do to people with multiple hits in the head. And so the study was published in a journal called neural regulation. And that is a beautiful story of getting 50 former professional NFL players into rooms and actually scanning their brain using something called quantitative EEG analysis called a brain view neuro scan probe, that's the name of the device. And what we did is we wanted to see what their brains actually did, Looking at the brain patterns before and after nationals. Specifically this formulation called focus from my body. And so this is a THC free version, which means zero THC in it. And what I really want to know is because there hasn't really been any studies done on THC formulations of what it actually does to the brain and does it develop resilience, and the answer is yes. So, the actual studies showed that there's actually improved resilience to improve reaction time, right? And improve able to improve the ability for the brain to categorize things as well. And this is just a few minutes after taking cannabinoids. So this is sort of a landmark thing. And so when that got published, what, what did the NFL do? Their antennas perked up the antenna?

Jonas Crafts

Well, I think it was they made sure we had it published because at the beginning it was like, no, no, no. Now that you published it now they're going, hey, right, you guys are actually doing something right,

Cheng Ruan, MD

Right. And so we come to a point in time where, you know, we know that stuff like cannabinoids and stuff like that can potentially improve the brain in some way. This is the first study is actually showing that there are quantitative improvements right. We're turning words into numbers



instead of people saying I kind of feel better now. We're saying you're this much person better and this is physical analysis saying that this is statistically significant. So you know now we're in a very different world. We're in a world where chronic traumatic encephalopathy is all over the news. We're in a world where there's a recognition by very big professional companies from the NFL to World Cup. We recognize that it's a natural thing. Where do you, what do you wish the world would know in the next five years about C. T. E.?

Jonas Crafts

What do I wish for them to know? I wish for them to know how to stop it before it happens. Because if we could get science there now we can go play without having to worry about am I gonna be able to walk you know 20 years 30 years from now? You know because that's the scary part. I mean to have my dad do what he did and he just it was a downhill slope for two years after I said it was a shell of a man and I didn't like seeing my dad like that. But it was just it was not getting better. It was only getting worse. There was really nothing that we could do about it. So my whole wishes that can we prevent anything like that from happening. So that way nobody has to be in my shoes or anybody's shoes that has passive C. T. E. To see that happen to a family member. How can we completely stop that if we could.

Cheng Ruan, MD

Yeah. You know I think a lot of answers are really gonna come in the next few years and I think that the world has an understanding now there's modifiable risk factors as well. And there are even genetics that people are now understanding as a risk factor. For example there's something called the April E4 which is called the Alzheimer's gene. In reality it just means the brain can create more inflammation but CTE can develop because of that as well. I have one of the copies of that gene and I have my own traumatic experiences with concussions as well. And so we know that now there's other things like pre seminal in one preseason Million two and all these different things that we're looking at the world of Alzheimer's disease. But we're translating that to chronic traumatic encephalopathy as well. And that's the beauty of what we're going really in the next five years.

And I think that if the people are educated and understand those risk factors and even get genetic tests beforehand. Right baseline baseline then I can discuss with my daughters whether or not they should really go into soccer right by the way soccer is a really girls, soccer has an extremely high rates of concussions right after boys football. Yeah. And in fact, the impact is actually identical to football in the soccer arena. So we, so, you know, as a father of three girls and, you know, and making decisions based on this, I think all those things are really necessary to understand, like, what are my risk factors and is it really worth it as well? Right, And what do

[DRTALKS.COM/REVERSEBRAINDISORDERS-2022](https://drtalks.com/reversebraindisorders-2022)

DISCLAIMER: This transcript was generated using artificial intelligence and may contain typographical errors. If you have questions, suggestions, or corrections, feel free to contact us at support@drtalks.com



you think? And going back to the topic of cannabinoids and CBD, what do you think is going to be the friction point? Let me rework that, what do you think it's gonna take for people to start realizing that stuff like diet and CBD or, you know, other things and physical activity, what do you think it's gonna take them to understand that these are the actual things that we should be doing?

Jonas Crafts

I think it's gonna take us that it's played before.

Cheng Ruan, MD

Yes.

Jonas Crafts

I think it's going to take the coaches, the trainers, because I think science is getting better, right? We're always getting bigger, faster, stronger.

Cheng Ruan, MD

Right.

Jonas Crafts

So the science is getting good on that realm. I think we need to get the science good on the preventative realm as well for the brains and once, once kids start doing that, the coaches are gonna talk to the parents, the parents are gonna talk to the kids, that's why I think that is how we do a main state. They can't go talk to their family practice doc per se. You know, he might not know everything about what we're doing with this, but it's the guys that do it, it's having that first hand experience. I mean I think I told you that's when I I just felt like my brain opened up the first two weeks, I was taking focus. I was like, okay, I can notice my knees because my joints were feeling better.

But it took about a month and I was like, whoa, everything open for my brain. For the most part, I would talk to my friends and going, oh Jonas, you just trying to sell me a bottle of what I said, I don't I'm not trying to sell you anything, but I know you've had more concussions than I have and I know how your life is. I've talked to your wife, I've talked to your kids and they're saying that they don't even know who you are today. And so as they get on these products are going, Jonas, thank you, I'm getting the phone calls, I'm getting the text messages, Jonas, thank you. You know, he won't, he won't ever listen to us, but he listens to you and I think it's us guys and it's that peer to peer talking and educating that really needs to take place now. So that way we can



go talk to the coaches, we can go talk to the trainers, we can go talk to the strength conditioning coaches. So that way we can get a better protocol again, starting from the NFL College high school down to pee wee football.

Cheng Ruan, MD

Right? And what was so powerful for me, being a private investigator on that study or principal investigator on the study was that I've never really spoken to large groups of people playing professional football before. I have, one of the ones I have friends has been an NFL yourself, a few of the ones as well. But when everyone got into a group it was such so powerful because they were talking about symptoms they've never told anybody and I'm just like a fly on the wall. I'm like whoa like this reminds me of the military veteran P. T. S. D. Group we used to hold in my office back in the day and it's like we're starting to share stories and people think and people are asking me well this is this is normal for me to like space out a little bit and then come back into the conversation like well no it's not, you know and it can really affect relationships and it has effective relationship quite a bit. It can create addictive tendencies, right?

It can create so much like over excitation especially you know after they retired from the NFL that they're going down the same road but they think that maybe it's just me, right? And so, seeing those symptoms pop up and having people talk about it is exceptionally important. So, what are the symptoms of panic attacks? For no reason. One of the biggest things that people talk about during, during the study, right. Another one is being really triggered with anxiety, really terrible sleep okay. Or sometimes they have too much sleep and they wake up and they still feel like busted them in the face. Right? So these are just things that are that, that people don't talk about because they think that this is a normal thing, but it's not a normal thing. And if you're listening to this and you've had concussions yourself, you kind of understand, you know, after these, these injuries, it's not necessarily easy to recover from, but they're modifiable risk factors, Right? And so, last question that I would like for you to talk about is what have you learned, maybe in the last year or two, that you wish you knew when you were playing football.

Jonas Crafts

Oh, wow. It's funny, I kinda just want to piggyback on what you said earlier, because as you just started talking about all those things, it just made me think of who I was five years ago, just that reactive person just irritable for no reason, something could happen. And I just go off, but it's like, you know, football, we're trained to do that almost. And I was like, no, no, I was, I would tell my staff like, no, this is how I respond, just get it. Once I started getting this in my body. It was like, you just, you brought back memories from literally five years ago on how I used to act and react and feel.

DRTALKS.COM/REVERSEBRAINDISORDERS-2022

DISCLAIMER: This transcript was generated using artificial intelligence and may contain typographical errors. If you have questions, suggestions, or corrections, feel free to contact us at support@drtalks.com



And I was like, damn, I did like, I don't, I don't like that. I didn't like who I was. I remember, God, I'll just, I'll say this. I was Successful in my business. I was making more money in my business than I did in the NFL and I just remember I was depressed. I remember literally sitting on the floor of my condo, on the 25th floor overlooking San Antonio and just going, why do I have all this? This is, this is so stupid. It's not, nothing makes me happy right now. It was the weirdest feeling because I literally had everything that you would want the watches, the cars, the condo, the lifestyle and I'm sitting there depressed as hell and I did, I did not like that. And so now as we move on forward, that last question was, what would I like to see come to fruition?

Cheng Ruan, MD

Well, what, what, what do you wish you knew when you were playing football back in the day.

Jonas Crafts

That there was a way to prevent this.

Cheng Ruan, MD

There's a way to prevent this.

Jonas Crafts

There was, there was a right way. Let me say this. There was a right way to feed my brain after it went through chaos.

Cheng Ruan, MD

There it goes.

Jonas Crafts

The simplicity of that.

Cheng Ruan, MD

So even though a lot of this is preventable, even if you do have symptoms of chronic traumatic encephalopathy, that it's never too late. You know, you can turn it around like Jonas did a few years ago and that's what's the most important thing. Well Jonas, thank you so much for being vulnerable and talking to me. Always a good friend. I appreciate it.



Jonas Crafts

Thank you for all you've done for us and what we're doing so that we've got to share this with the rest of the world, including us athletes.

Cheng Ruan, MD

Thank you so much.

Jonas Crafts

Yes, sir. Thank you.

Cheng Ruan, MD

Thank you.