FOOTBALL FATALITIES AND CATASTROPHIC INJURIES, 1931–2008
Football Fatalities and Catastrophic Injuries, 1931–2008

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to all of the football players who had a fatal or catastrophic injury during their playing days. It is also dedicated to the researchers who were responsible for the many changes in the game of football that made it a much safer sport for the participants.

A special thanks to the American Football Coaches Association, the National Federation of State High School Association, and the National Collegiate Athletic Associations.

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Foreword

Grant Teaff—Executive Director,
American Football Coaches Association


In 1906, the President of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt, determined that the game of American football needed to be fixed because, as the game was played at the turn of the century, catastrophic injuries were prevalent and there were few rules to govern the brutality of the sport. President Roosevelt asked prominent coaches of the day to fix the sport or he would strongly consider banning the game of football.

The coaches took the President’s challenge seriously and began to create rules of play and conduct. Later, eligibility rules and academic requirements would be added as the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) was formed to enforce the new rules and regulations for the game of football.

In 1922, that same group of coaches formed an organization that they named the American Football Coaches Association. A code of ethics for coaching was laid out and in its constitution, AFCA determined “to maintain the highest possible standards in football and the profession of coaching” and to “provide a forum for the discussion and study of all matters pertaining to football and coaching.”

One of the most important matters pertaining to football and coaching is the health and well-being of the student athlete. Information creates awareness and awareness creates rules, coaching techniques, and review of fundamental blocking and tackling. Therefore, data regarding catastrophic injuries in the game of football has been collected by the AFCA since 1931.

As a member of the Board, and as Executive Director, I have observed Dr. Mueller and Dr. Cantu as they have meticulously worked to secure the catastrophic injury data that has added to the desired health and well-being of our student athletes. In 1968, football had 36 fatalities. The research done by the
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National Center for Catastrophic Sports Injury Research (NCCSIR), funded by the AFCA, played a major role in making the game safer, and in 1990 there were zero fatalities. In 2008, there were seven fatalities directly linked to football; all were at the high school level. The research and the data gathered on catastrophic injuries is more important now than ever, as more young men are playing the game from youth football through the professional ranks.

This book should be read by every football coach and administrator in America. There is a chapter on the history of football, and chapters with data on every decade of football beginning in 1931. Drs. Mueller and Cantu have compared the number of injuries to the rules and equipment that was used at the time. With the information provided by the yearly report and working with the NCAA, the AFCA has been a part of the implementation of numerous rule changes, spring practice and preseason legislation that provides a safer environment for workouts and games. The book clearly shows how equipment changes over the years have played a very important role in safety.

As long as there is a game of football, the work at the NCCSIR must continue to provide data that will make our great game safer.

The diligence and competence of accomplished men is shown in the details of this outstanding book on the 79 years of research that has made our game better and safer.