

Research improves understanding of dementia in former football and rugby players

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Results of the largest study to date of the pathology of dementia in former footballers and rugby players have been revealed.

In a study published in *Acta Neuropathologica* and led by the University

of Glasgow in collaboration with the University of Pennsylvania, the researchers report that while a [pathology](#) associated with [brain injury](#)—[chronic traumatic encephalopathy](#) (CTE) – might be common in former athletes with [dementia](#), in many cases its clinical significance remains uncertain.

The research—which looked at the brains of 11 former footballers or [rugby players](#) with a history of dementia—found CTE pathology was present in around 75% of these cases. However, the researchers also noted many other complex and mixed degenerative brain pathologies co-existing with CTE in many cases.

Dr. Willie Stewart, Honorary Clinical Associate Professor at the University of Glasgow's Institute of Neuroscience and Psychology said: "Our findings suggest that, while CTE is prevalent in a high number of the patients we studied, in many cases it is not the primary pathology driving the dementia.

"In other words, while head injury-associated degenerative brain disease is important in these patients, the reality of dementia in former footballers and rugby players is that the disease is more than just CTE, and more complex.

"This work demonstrates the incredible importance of research brain donation to support such detailed examination of the pathology of dementia, and we are incredibly grateful to all the families who have supported our studies in this way."

Alan Shearer, who has campaigned for research into this issue, said: "This is incredibly important work by Dr. Stewart and his team in Glasgow. Finally, we are beginning to see some progress towards understanding dementia in former footballers and I look forward to hearing more from these studies."

More information: Edward B. Lee et al. Chronic traumatic encephalopathy is a common co-morbidity, but less frequent primary dementia in former soccer and rugby players, *Acta Neuropathologica* (2019). [DOI: 10.1007/s00401-019-02030-y](https://doi.org/10.1007/s00401-019-02030-y)

Provided by University of Glasgow

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