

NFL rookie retires to avoid the risk of head injury

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San Francisco 49ers inside linebacker Chris Borland (50) tackles Washington running back Alfred Morris (46) during the second half of an NFL football game in Santa Clara, California, Nov. 23, 2014. The 49ers announced late Monday that Borland is retiring after one season, without offering specifics. Photo: AP Photo/Tony Avelar, File

SAN FRANCISCO — Worried about head injuries, San Francisco 49ers linebacker Chris Borland is leaving football. Not even the promise of stardom and piles of money could change his mind.

After one outstanding rookie season, Borland is retiring at age 24.

The 49ers announced his decision Monday night, without offering an explanation. Earlier in the day, however, Borland told the ESPN television program "Outside the Lines" that he wants to do "what's best for my health."

There is increasing evidence that the repeated blows to the head football players sustain can lead to memory loss, headaches, confusion, moodiness and other serious symptoms. Damaging blows to the head, or concussions, are common in football and several other

contact sports. Players often recover fully from a single concussion, yet multiple concussions can sometimes lead to permanent brain damage, behavioral problems and depression.

A Punishing Player

Borland had a team-leading 108 tackles as a rookie, emerging as a punishing defender. He also had a sack and two interceptions.

"From what I've researched and what I've experienced, I don't think it's worth the risk," Borland said during Monday's interview. "I feel largely the same, as sharp as I've ever been," he said. However, he added, "I'm concerned that if you wait till you have symptoms, it's too late."

49ers general manager Trent Baalke said the team was surprised by his move, but added that it respected Borland's decision.

Borland's big announcement comes less than a week after five-time All Pro linebacker Patrick Willis walked away from football. Borland replaced Willis in the starting lineup after Willis suffered a toe injury in October that required surgery.

The National Football League (NFL), like the 49ers, said it respects Borland's decision, adding that "playing any sport is a personal decision." The league stressed that "football has never been safer." It noted that rule changes, better equipment and improved medical care have all led to progress.

"A Consummate Professional"

Jeff Miller, NFL senior vice president of health and safety, said the changes have led to real improvements throughout the NFL. Concussions "were down 25 percent last year, continuing a three-year downward trend," he said.

"We continue to make significant investments in independent research to advance the science and understanding of these issues. We are seeing a growing culture of safety. Everyone involved in the game knows that there is more work to do and player safety will continue to be our top priority," Miller said.

The retirements of Willis and Borland are big blows to the 49ers, who have suffered a series of other recent losses. The team lost coach Jim Harbaugh and defensive coordinator Vic Fangio after the season ended. It then watched Frank Gore, Mike Lupati, Chris Culliver and Perrish Cox leave for other teams this past week. Defensive line coach Jim Tomsula was promoted to head coach following an 8-8 season, the team's first time out of the playoffs in four years.

"While unexpected, we certainly respect Chris' decision," Baalke said. "From speaking with Chris, it was evident that he had put a great deal of thought into this decision. He was a consummate professional from Day One and a very well-respected member of our team and community."

He added, "Chris is a determined young man that overcame long odds in his journey to the NFL and we are confident he will use the same approach to become very successful in his future endeavors. We will always consider him a 49er and wish him all the best."

Quiz

- 1 Select the paragraph from the section "A Punishing Player" that explains why Borland decided to leave even before he was injured.

- 2 Which sentence helps explain how the NFL has responded to the large number of concussions experienced by NFL players?
 - (A) "We continue to make significant investments in independent research to advance the science and understanding of these issues."
 - (B) "Everyone involved in the game knows that there is more work to do and player safety will continue to be our top priority," Miller said.
 - (C) "From speaking with Chris, it was evident that he had put a great deal of thought into this decision. He was a consummate professional from Day One and a very well-respected member of our team and community."
 - (D) "Chris is a determined young man that overcame long odds in his journey to the NFL and we are confident he will use the same approach to become very successful in his future endeavors. We will always consider him a 49er and wish him all the best."

- 3 Select the paragraph from the introduction [paragraphs 1-4] that summarizes the article as a whole.

- 4 What would be another good title for the for the article?
 - (A) "Football causes concussions"
 - (B) "Linebacker Borland leaves football"
 - (C) "Football player Borland at risk for injury"
 - (D) "San Francisco 49er worries about injuries"