

Ahead of Super Bowl, Trump Raises Doubts on Tackle Football for His Son

ATLANTA

– Hours before the sport's biggest game, President Trump joined the growing ranks of parents anxious over tackle football, saying in an interview he "would have a hard time" letting his 12-year-old son play.

"I mean, it's a dangerous sport and I think it's, I, it's really tough" if his son wanted to take up the game, Mr. Trump said in an interview with CBS ahead of its Sunday evening broadcast of the Super Bowl.

The president's concerns are at odds with his previous criticism that the N.F.L. has been making the game too soft to avoid concussions and other injuries, and suggest that he is struggling with many of the same questions that parents across the country are asking about the safety of youth tackle football.

Mr. Trump said he would ultimately let his youngest son, Barron, who plays soccer, decide if he wanted to play tackle football and would not steer him away from the sport.

But

the president said he had seen reports about the dangers of playing tackle football, and heard that some N.F.L. players were not letting their sons play tackle football.

His comments added another wrinkle to his ambivalent relationship with the game he often celebrates, but also laments. His doubts about the safety of the game come five years after President Barack Obama said that if he had a son, he would not let him play professional football. You have **4 free articles** remaining. Subscribe to The Times

Some studies have suggested that playing tackle football before age 12 puts athletes at a higher risk of developing cognitive problems later in life, but the issue has not been widely studied. In general, there has been growing awareness of C.T.E., a degenerative brain disease many former players have developed from repeated hits to the head.

As a result of such concerns, participation in flag football has exploded.

Yet while Mr. Obama held a forum at the White House on the dangers of concussions, Mr. Trump has repeatedly said the N.F.L. is being overprotective.

In September 2017, for instance, Mr. Trump complained that the N.F.L. was ruining the game because the referees were trying to control unnecessarily rough tackles.

“Today if you hit too hard – 15 yards! Throw him out of the game!” he said, adding: “They’re ruining the game! They’re ruining the game. That’s what they want to do. They want to hit. They want to hit! It is hurting the game.”

At a campaign rally in 2016, Mr. Trump referred to a woman in the audience who fainted, but returned to the crowd.

“The woman was out cold and now she’s coming back,” he said. “See? We don’t go by these new, and very much softer, N.F.L. rules. Concussion. Oh, oh! Got a little ding on the head. No, no, you can’t play for the rest of the season. Our people are tough.”

Trump also called the N.F.L. “soft” for penalizing helmet-to-helmet hits.

In the CBS interview, however, he sounded more cautionary notes.

“I hate to say it, because I love to watch football,” Mr. Trump said. “I think the N.F.L. is a great product, but I really think that as far as my son – well, I’ve heard N.F.L. players saying they wouldn’t let their sons play football. So, it’s not totally unique, but I, I would have a hard time with it.”