

Roenick's

RX

When It Comes To Concussions, NHL Veteran Is The Voice Of Experience And Reason

By Ricki Dugdale

As a seasoned NHL player, Jeremy Roenick has experienced more than his fair share of concussions — at least 11 since he was 11-years-old — and he knows that they are no picnic in the park. He also knows that his next one could be his last.

He remembers one time when he was with the Chicago Blackhawks being knocked out during a game in Minnesota and waking up in the training room with no idea how he got there, and then playing the very next night.

"They let me play ... within a 24-hour span without any question of how I felt," recalls the 38-year-old Roenick. "Nowadays they sit you out for at least a week."

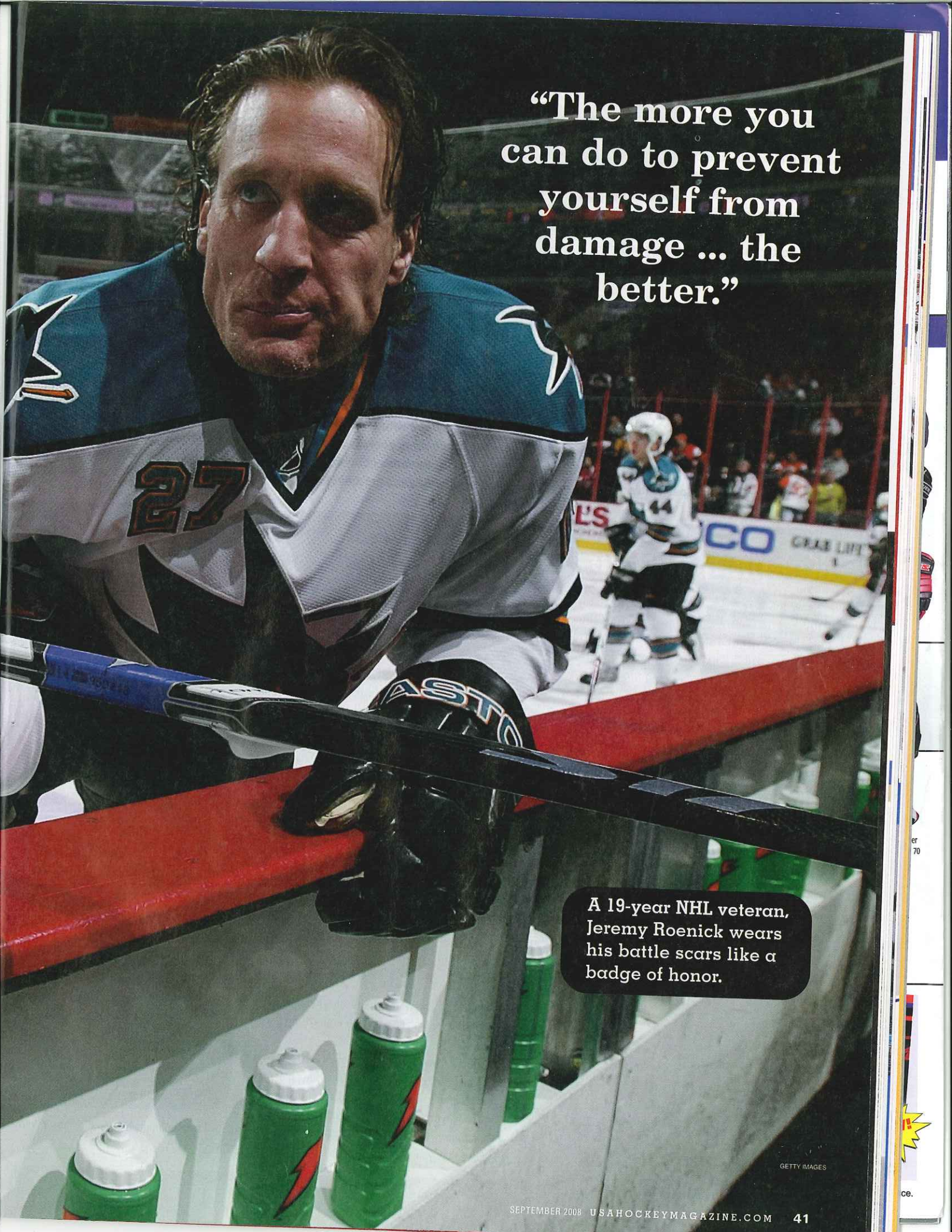
Hockey has made great strides when it comes to diagnosing and treating concussions. But, as Roenick points out, there is still a long way to go.

It starts with changing the mindset that playing through the hazy pain of a concussion is the macho thing to do. Acting like the tough guy when it comes to concussions only makes the injury worse. As a tough guy himself, Roenick can attest that rest is the only way to combat the effects of a concussion.

"Just to relax and not to do anything for about seven to 10 days," says Roenick, who is preparing for his 20th NHL season and second with the San Jose Sharks.

"Don't do anything that could raise your blood pressure. You don't want to have a situation where you're going to have a lot of blood that's rushing into your brain when you've had trauma like that."





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A 19-year NHL veteran,
Jeremy Roenick wears
his battle scars like a
badge of honor.

GETTY IMAGES

The least amount of activity that you can do after is good."

With more than 1,300 NHL games under his belt, Roenick knows how tough it is to watch the game from the sidelines, but it's better than living with the symptoms of a concussion.

"It's amazing what your brain can do to your body when it gets injured," he says. "As soon as your blood pressure gets going you become nauseous and start throwing up. It's a terrible feeling to go through."

While today's equipment provides players with greater protection, the risk of injury remains in hockey, as it does with other con-

tact sports. In the end, using your brain is still the best way of keeping it safe.

"The more you can do to prevent yourself from damage, from the protection of your helmet, wearing a mouthpiece and being very

mind," Roenick says. "I am very cautious about where I put my body.

"Because with the number of head injuries that I've had, you never know when that next one might be the killer." ❖



Even after so many concussions, Jeremy Roenick still plays a physical game.

aware of what you're doing on the ice, the better," advises Roenick.

Educating players, parents and coaches about the serious effects of concussions remains a main goal for those involved in the sport. No longer are players told to shake it off and get back in the game. That old way of thinking not only jeopardizes a player's career, but his life away from hockey as well.

"I think about it a lot. It's always in the back of my

Keeping An Eye On Concussions

The game of hockey has changed dramatically over the years, with players increasing in size and strength as the speed of the game increases. With bigger, stronger players flying around the ice faster than before, the risk of head injuries increases as well.

Hockey is also a game for "tough guys" and in order to uphold that image, most players will ignore the symptoms of a concussion or return to the ice too soon.

Concussions can sometimes happen in contact sports like hockey. However, because most people are not familiar with how to recognize a concussion, these injuries often go unreported by the athlete, untreated, undiagnosed or even misdiagnosed.

A concussion is a serious injury, no matter how "minor" it appears to be, and the proper diagnosis and treatment means a prolonged and safer career for players.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention has provided a list of symptoms to look for whether you're an athlete, a coach or a parent and what the course of action should be in treating the injury.

Players

Symptoms

- Headache or "pressure" in the head
- Nausea or vomiting
- Balance problems or dizziness
- Double or blurry vision
- Bothered by light and/or noise
- Feeling sluggish, hazy, foggy or groggy
- Difficulty paying attention
- Memory problems
- Confusion
- Don't "feel right"

If you think you have a concussion, follow these steps:

- 1) Tell your coaches and your parents
- 2) Get a medical check up
- 3) Give yourself time to get better

It's important to be HONEST about how you are feeling. Concussions left untreated are cause for concern because you are more likely to sustain the injury again, and permanent damage becomes more likely the more concussions you receive. It is better to miss a game or two than an entire season.

While it is not possible to eliminate your concussion risk by 100 percent, there are a few guidelines you can follow to lower your chances.

- Follow your coach's rules for safety and the rules of the game
- Practice good sportsmanship at all times
- Use the proper equipment. And remember, in order for your equipment to protect you like it was designed to do it must be the right equipment for the game, position or activity, it must be worn correctly and fit well and it must be used every time you play.

The Right Bite

Hockey players who chew on their mouth guards like a baby teething on a pacifier aren't doing themselves or their team any favors.

A pacifier won't safeguard a baby's first teeth, and a mouth guard won't protect a player's teeth or prevent a concussion if it's hanging out of the side of your mouth or dangling from a strap.

Improperly wearing a mouth guard can also cost you time in the penalty box. First comes a warning and then you sit for 10 minutes for violating Rule 304 c.



By Theresa Rohr-Kirchgraber

• The flu is a virus and by the time you know one player is sick, the rest have most likely been exposed. It is possible to have player



The flu strikes quickly. You can wake up feeling OK and over the next few hours, you get a high fever, your face feels flushed and every muscle in your body aches. You get chills, headaches, nausea, fatigue, and occasionally,

One way to make sure your team has the best possibility of winning is to make sure they all get the flu vaccine. This is one give-and-go you don't want your team to practice.

Theresa Rohr-Kirchgraber is a hockey mom of three who is also an adolescent medicine physician at the Indiana University School of Medicine.

Also, be sure that you inform coaches in ALL sports your child participates in of any recent concussions.

