



News Release

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FORMER WWE WRESTLER SAYS SPORTS SHOULD GIVE CHILDREN LIFE LESSONS, NOT BRAIN DAMAGE

(RICHMOND, Va.) —Chris Nowinski, whose career as a professional wrestler ended after repeated concussions, will discuss his efforts to alert parents and health care providers to the dangers of sports concussions in children as Commonwealth agencies and community partners come together July 26 for “Brain Injury Report Out Day.”

[Nowinski](#) will be the morning keynote speaker for the biennial conference, hosted by the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services and the [Virginia Brain Injury Council](#) at the Westin Hotel in Richmond. The [Brain Injury Association of Virginia](#) is helping to coordinate the day’s events, which include reports from related state agencies on how they serve and meet the needs of Virginians with acquired brain injury.

The 2013 conference will focus on the risk and impact of sports concussion on young athletes and how the Commonwealth is responding through the Department of Education’s role in implementing recent legislation and education in this area. State agencies will also address issues such as crisis intervention, neurobehavioral needs, veterans’ issues and Medicaid funding. The workshop runs from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Nowinski, a Harvard University graduate, debuted on World Wrestling Entertainment’s flagship program Monday Night RAW in 2002. As “Chris Harvard,” he was named “Newcomer of the Year” by RAW Magazine. He was the youngest male Hardcore Champion in WWE history before concussions forced him to retire in 2004.

“Our challenge is to figure out how to reform sports to a point where we can be confident that children will walk away from sports with positive life lessons and not with permanent brain damage or disease,” said Nowinski. “Educating athletes, coaches, parents, athletic administrators, referees and medical professionals is the first step to solving the concussion crisis.”

Nowinski went on to help start the Sports Legacy Institute in Boston in response to the post-mortem research on former athletes revealing that repeated brain injuries could lead to a

neurodegenerative disease known as chronic traumatic encephalopathy. The institute, which recently received a \$1.2 million donation from the WWE, partners with the Boston University School of Medicine in the Center for the Study of Traumatic Encephalopathy.

Other speakers at the conference include Mitchell Callis of the Virginia Athletic Trainers' Association and Dr. Jeffrey Barth, co-director of the Neurocognitive Assessment Laboratory at the University of Virginia School of Medicine and director of its Brain Injury and Sports Concussion Institute. Barth is a member of the NFL Players Association Concussion Committee and works with the U.S. Department of Defense and the American Academy of Neurology on the development of concussion management guidelines.

During the event, the Virginia Brain Injury Council will honor state Sen. Emmett W. Hanger Jr. of Augusta County for his commitment and perseverance in championing the needs of Virginians with brain injury and their family members.

"I am pleased that the Virginia Brain Injury Council began a tradition in 2009 to recognize legislators who have expressed their commitment to supporting Virginians with acquired brain injury," said Brian Shenal, a neuropsychologist who chairs the Virginia Brain Injury Council and directs the Center for Neurocognitive Services at the Salem VA Medical Center. "Sen. Hanger is such an individual and we are happy to present him with the council's 'Brain Injury Champion Award' for 2013."

DARS Commissioner Jim Rothrock will present the DARS Toggle Award, named for the "Doodlesbury" comic strip character Leo "Toggle" DeLuca, who suffered brain injury during his Army service in Iraq. The honoree will be announced at the event.

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The Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services, in collaboration with community partners, provides and advocates for resources and services to improve the employment, quality of life, security, and independence of older Virginians, Virginians with disabilities, and their families. For more information, visit www.vadars.org.