

# BEST HEALTHCARE PODCAST

UCLA Health's BrainSPORT Podcast Tackles Today's Most Pressing Brain Injury and Brain Health Topics

## PROBLEM

About 3.8 million concussions occur every year in the U.S. due to sports-related injuries, with up to 10% of athletes experiencing a concussion each season, according to the CDC. And while the long-term consequences of these brain injuries remain largely unknown, it's important for athletes, coaches, parents and others to understand what we do know about brain health, injury and prevention.

At UCLA's Health Steve Tisch BrainSPORT program, that kind of broad community outreach and education is a key goal. So, when COVID-19 halted our in-person education sessions, we came up with another way to fulfill our mission: a podcast. Launched in November 2021, the BrainSport podcast delivers balanced, science-based information about concussion and sports neurology topics in the news.

## INSIGHT

**THE UCLA HEALTH BRAINSPORT PROGRAM LEADS THE FIELD WITH A MULTIDISCIPLINARY PROGRAM THAT:**

- 1** Brings together specialists in neurology, neurosurgery, neuropsychology and sports medicine to provide comprehensive care for people with brain injuries
- 2** Moves the science of brain injuries forward through research that seeks to better understand the long-term effects of brain injuries and develop new treatments and prevention strategies
- 3** Leads conversations on brain health, including mental health, that inform the public and help shape national policies



As part of an innovative program located in a world-class institution, BrainSPORT features weekly episodes with in-depth discussions among experts and elite athletes on topics ranging from CTE diagnosis and concussions in the Winter Olympics to the effect of deep space travel on the brain.

Hosted by neurologist and athlete Daniel Adel Rafie, MD, the program draws on a vast network of experts within the UCLA community and other leading institutions, such as Harvard University and biotech company Altos Labs. They include physicians and scientists as well as athletes who have experienced brain injuries in sports ranging from football and volleyball to soccer and skeleton bobsled.

## SOLUTION

The BrainSPORT podcast was developed with the support of BrainSPORT Program Director Christopher Giza, MD; Associate Director Joshua Goldman, MD, MBA; and the BrainSPORT community outreach committee.

To date, the podcast has 12 theme-based episodes broken down into bite-sized 20- to 30- minute YouTube clips. Segments often reflect the news of the day, whether it's psychedelic drug dosing for brain injuries or media coverage of CTE and high-profile athletes such as the NFL's Antonio Brown.

Dr. Rafie (known as "Adel" on the podcast) and his guests explore topics in detail, translating medical perspectives into accessible language for a non-medical audience and aiming to dispel common misconceptions.

### NOTABLE EPISODES INCLUDE:

**EPISODE 8 - REVIEWING PHILIP ADAMS' CTE DIAGNOSIS:** Adams is the former NFL player who fatally shot six people, then took his own life last year before an autopsy revealed he had CTE. Dr. Rafie and sports neurologist Kevin Bickart, MD, PhD, analyze the case and media firestorm around it. They also discuss what doctors currently know and don't know about CTE. As subject matter experts, they offer information, resources and hope for current and former athletes concerned they may experience CTE.

**EPISODE 6 - MENTAL HEALTH AND LIFE AFTER FOOTBALL:** Retired NFL player Brandon Bostick joins Dr. Rafie to discuss how his mental health declined after an error in a game led to his early retirement. The episode concludes with Mr. Bostick's heartful messages to young athletes.

**EPISODES 2 & 4 - CONCUSSIONS IN WOMEN'S SOCCER AND VOLLEYBALL:** Sofia Chambers (former captain of the University of Oregon Women's soccer team) and Hayley Hodson (former NCAA Division 1 Women's Volleyball Rookie of the Year) dive deep into the wide-ranging effects of concussion and how they can end a promising sports career.

**EPISODE 12 - THE EFFECT OF LONG-TERM SPACE TRAVEL ON THE BRAIN:** One of the most significant health issues related to deep space travel is the impact of cosmic radiation on the brain. This episode represents a shift in the BrainSPORT podcast to address overall brain health. A future segment in this episode will include a NASA astronaut.

## METRICS

The BrainSPORT podcast attracted more than **38,000** views on YouTube through June 2022.

**AUDIENCE FEEDBACK HAS BEEN UNIVERSALLY POSITIVE AND GROWING. DR. RAFIE RECALLED THE IMPACT IT MADE ON A CALLER FROM ATLANTA, GEORGIA:**

"He was crying when he called and told me about some mental health issues he was going through," Dr. Rafie says. "He said it was incredible to see the podcast and this issue discussed so openly by a former professional football player. The episode allowed the caller to be more comfortable talking about his own struggles with mental health problems."

