

## KEPOROS HAS BEEN A SUCCESS IN LIFE, BUT TEAMMATES WORRIED ABOUT HIS HEAD INJURIES. 'DON'T MAKE ME LIKE GEORGE,' SAID ONE AFTER GETTING A CONCUSSION.

we talked, Roach staggered about because of Parkinson's syndrome caused by boxing too long. His first symptoms appeared at age 27.

"They told me to retire, and I had five more fights and got knocked out in two of them," he says. "I probably have dementia — pugilistica dementia. I do respond to Dopamine two times a day. But I have tremors, I have drop-foot, I trip a lot."

It's hard to get out on top, isn't it? I say to him.

He smiles ruefully. "Only one of my fighters retired as a champion."

But such stories might be irrelevant to us former college football players. We didn't play for years and years. We didn't exclusively hit each other in the heads.

Talk about good brains? There were 31 players on our freshman team in 1967, and 18 made it to our senior season. Among the 18, we have three post-graduate education degrees, a doctorate of veterinary science, four MBAs, three law degrees and two Ph.Ds. (I'm sorry for bringing the curve down with my lowly B.A.)

By almost any measure, George Keporos, in the class behind me that has two MDs among its ranks, has been a success in life. While we were talking, his youngest daughter, Kelly, a 6-1 recently graduated scholarship volleyball player at Northwestern, entered the apartment, dropped off a few things, hugged her pop, said, "I love you," and left. Their affection was obvious. George's life is good.

But we're talking about maybes here. Kelly, after all, has two bad knees, and George says she'll likely need replacement surgery in her 30s. Sports competition carries its toll. I ask George if he has had any brain issues.

"My memory isn't what it used to be," he says. "I have to jot things down to remember them. I leave things on the counter over there and forget to pick them up. My memory loss is getting worse. Is that because I'm getting old?"

I laugh. I looked for my reading glasses for five minutes the other day, and they were on my head. I put the orange-juice in the cereal cabinet. I'm no judge.

George and I look at an old photo of him sacking the Syracuse quarterback. We study the enlarged and

**Even though Keporos' daughter, Kelly, didn't play football, sports has taken its toll on her, as she may need knee-replacement surgery when she hits her 30s.**



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framed newspaper page with photos of the Illinois 1967 All-State High School football team, with George there as well as Peoria's Voorhees, Elmhurst's Jack Durning and Moline's Randy Anderson, all of whom would be terrific players for Northwestern.

"You know, five years ago, I had amnesia," George says. "From 9 to 5 of that day I have no memory."

I look at him. I think about this. "Then how do you know it happened?"

"I'd gone to work and the manager at the store said I was walking in circles," he says. "He asked me if I was OK, and I kept saying, 'I don't know.' He drove me to the hospital, and at the hospital they asked me who the president was and I didn't know. I couldn't remember anything in the present. There's a name for what I had. But they couldn't find any reason for it, and it went away that day. I'm thinking, 'How about that hit in college?'"

A half hour after I leave, George calls my cell phone.

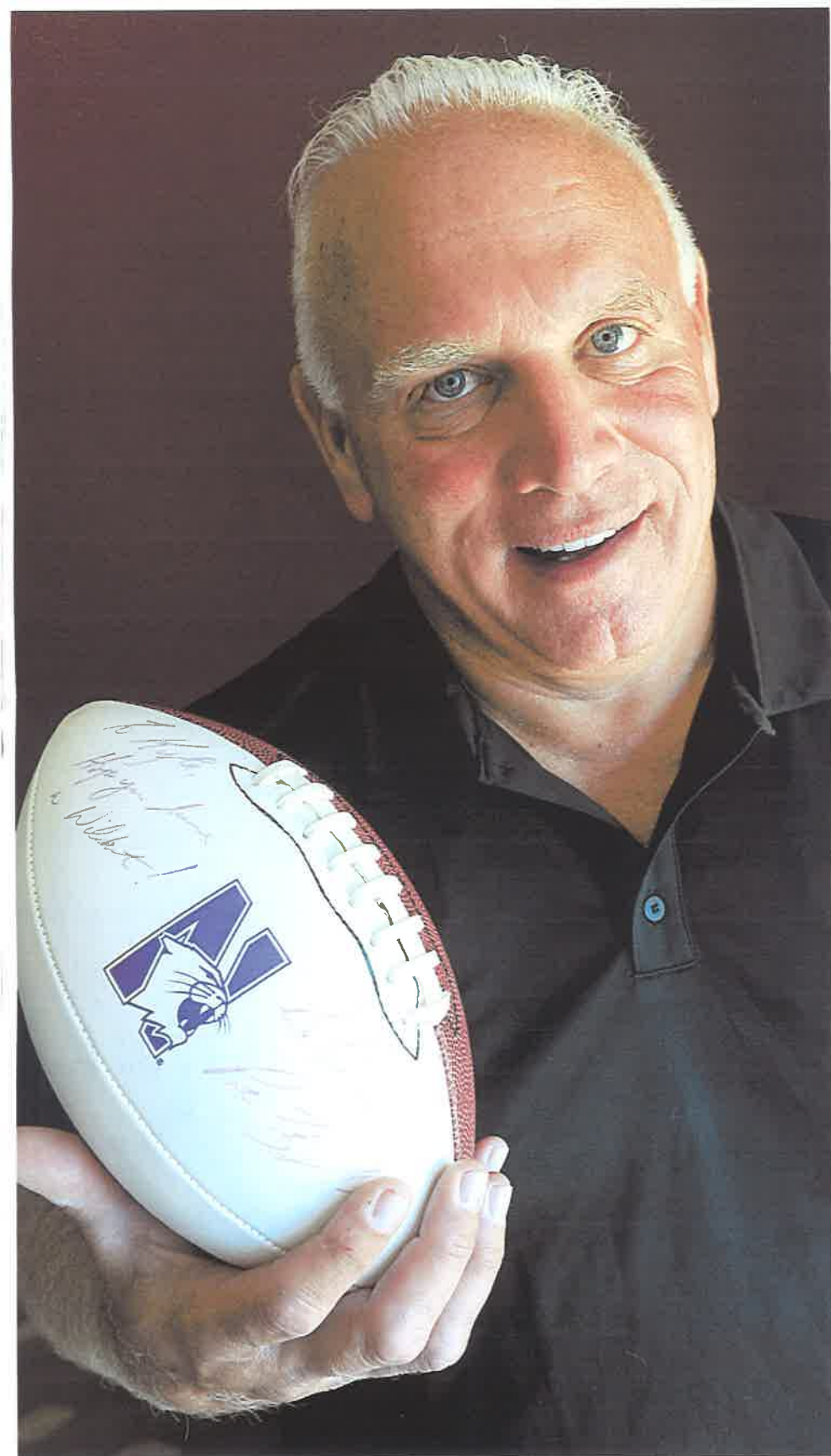
"I remembered it," he says. "It's called transient global amnesia."

Transient global amnesia, or TGA, has been described by neurologist Oliver Sacks as temporary "amnesia for the amnesia," in that for a brief time one can't remember that one has no memory. It's unknown what causes it, but stress, migraines, head injuries, compromised blood flow to the brain, sudden immersion in cold water, even sexual intercourse are believed to be possible catalysts.

It strikes me in a silly way that during the time when George was trying to recall the name of the episode, he displayed amnesia to the third level. Not true. As the Mayo Clinic describes it, TGA "is rare, seemingly harmless and unlikely to happen again. Episodes are usually short-lived, and afterward your memory is fine."

George is fine. As we all are for now. Until, as Sacks puts it, the "final amnesia" comes calling.

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JEAN LACHAT/SUN-TIMES

cury, Honda, Ford and Accura dealerships in Chicago. When they sold out at the perfect time — 2007 — George walked away with millions.

But what does the future hold? We all know the horror stories about former NFL players like Andre Waters, who shot himself at 44, and was found to have brain tissue resembling that of an 85-year-old man, with characteristics of early stage Alzheimer's.

But that's the NFL. Waters was a banger for a dozen years after college. Chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) is a long term for what boxers call dementia pugilistica, or plain old punch drunk. Yet it doesn't matter if you get the blows from a glove or a helmet, or, for that matter, fastballs or hockey

checks. CTE can apparently strike anyone who has had repeated and violent brain trauma.

Our middle linebacker John Voorhees likes to talk about the punch drunk boxer who used to loiter in front of the Busy Bee hamburger joint in downtown Peoria, near where John went to high school. The boxer was harmless, but he talked crazy stuff to the Spaulding guys when they came by for hot dogs, and he just seemed like a funny aberration.

I talked to Freddie Roach in Los Angeles recently. He's superstar boxer Manny Pacquiao's trainer, and he has trained 25 world champions. But he was once a ferocious pro fighter himself. Though he was only 49 when