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# Sports Stack

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## NFL Players and Organ Injuries

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Written by [kylestack](#) on 9/30/2011 10:39 AM

Tony Romo's recent lung injury made me wonder how NFL players with damaged organs are permitted to remain in the game. The Dallas Cowboys quarterback returned late in their Week 2 victory against the San Francisco 49ers, despite a collapsed lung and a fractured rib that had caused him to leave the game earlier. The circumstances around Romo's injury, and others like it, was explained to me by Gary Waslewski, an orthopedic surgeon for the Arizona Cardinals. The situation seems no less dangerous but much more sensible than I thought.

The situation is still worrisome because, as Waslewski told me, players often dictate their return. In the middle of a game, a player tells a doctor that he's fine—that he was just hit harder than usual. It's not until post-game that a doctor performs a urine drip for blood – signifying a badly bruised organ – or a CT scan, which can show an internal injury. But players are probably the worst ones to judge whether they're seriously hurt. Their insistence on playing makes sense because they typically choose competition over the bench.

Romo played Week 3 with the fractured rib still a nuisance; his lung reportedly healed. Another memorable example is the ruptured spleen former Tampa Bay Buccaneers quarterback Chris Simms suffered in 2006. He likely sustained the injury early on a tough hit, returned, then discovered after the game that it was quite serious. His spleen was removed in an emergency procedure later that day.

Waslewski says there is no chance a player in Romo or Simms' condition could play the following week with the organ's status unresolved. "We do not let them go back to play or practice until they have been evaluated and cleared by sub-specialists with follow-up testing," he wrote.

Which is how it should be. But there is no policy in-place for an internal injury like there is for a concussion. Waslewski noted that, unlike a potential concussion, it's too difficult to \*\*\*\* an internal injury within a small timeframe. That's why extensive tests are often done after a game. Yet the NFL's Player Safety Advisory Panel should live up to its name by exploring a safety precaution for players who injure an organ during a game.

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