

# Don Wainwright's finest contribution

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Three years ago Don Wainwright suffered such a severe head injury playing football that he was unconscious for 13 days and forced to give up the game.

Wainwright's close brush with death at Berkeley, Calif., where Missouri University opened its 1962 season, may lead eventually to greater safety for future players because the former Tiger end from Kirkwood has done research designed to produce a better helmet.

"I'm not going into the sporting goods business," said the smiling 24-year-old Wainwright, "but I'd like to think I've contributed something if the people who make sports equipment will follow up."

Wainwright's research into ways and means to make helmets more protective in an era of faster football and more savage collisions was channeled into his thesis for a master's degree in mechanical engineering at Missouri.

"A Simulated Crushable Material," which is what he called the thesis, is documented research into the feasibility of providing a pneumatic variance orifice system in the helmet.

Translated—and, friend, a dumb sports editor needed translation—Wainwright was seeking a way to spread the area of force and found it.

"I believe," he said, "it would be possible to distribute the impact of a blow to the head by combining a suspensor system in the helmet shell with a midband of pneumatic cells in the form of honeycombed high-strength rubber."

If that's not clear enough, forget it, Charley, which is more than Wainwright will be able to do about the reason for it all.

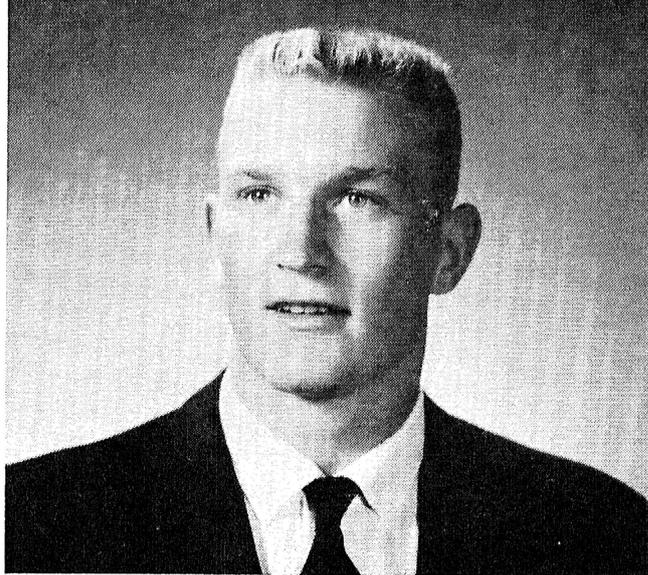
California scored first that balmy September afternoon three years ago in picturesque Strawberry Canyon on San Francisco bay. As Wainwright made the tackle at the goal-line, the California ball-carrier's foot broke the bar of his face mask.

Hurrying, Don grabbed a second helmet for the point after touchdown. The new headgear prevented a fractured cheekbone in the mishap that followed because the mask was secure, but it was too loose.

When Wainwright and teammate George Seals tore in from their end positions in an attempt to block the conversion attempt, Don dived headlong into Seals' knee, which was driving like a powerful piston.

The fierce blow, accelerated by the loose helmet, bruised the brain so badly that Wainwright not only lapsed into prolonged unconsciousness, but almost suffocated before a fast-working medical team on the field could use space left by a lost tooth to pry open his mouth.

Early brain surgery was indicated, but a University of California neurosurgeon, Dr. Lester Laurence, dissented. He would wait 14 days, he said.



*Don Wainwright*

On the thirteenth day, Wainwright regained consciousness.

Grateful to the surgeon who didn't operate, the former football player has sent Dr. Laurence a copy of his thesis on a proposed safer helmet.

Wainwright and his wife, the former Martha Ray, an Ocala (Fla.) girl he met when she was attending Stephens College at Columbia, stopped off here en route to his job with the West Virginia Pulp and Paper Co. in Covington, Va.

They visited his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Nelson Wainwright who missed seeing only one game he played in his injury-shortened college career. Ironically, it was the one in which he was hurt. His mother flew to his bedside and stayed through his weeks of convalescence.

Wainwright, reflecting on three varsity seasons in which Missouri lost only four games and scored victories in the Orange Bowl and Bluebonnet Bowl, was particularly proud of the mark his fellow linemen of the period have made since they left the campus.

Tackle Dave Gill, working on his Ph.D. in mathematics, is teaching at Michigan State. Ed Blaine, All-America tackle in 1961, is playing pro football with the Philadelphia Eagles and working on a master's in zoology, Wainwright said.

Guard Tom Hertz and center Jim Vermillion also have master's degrees. Hertz is with an oil company, Vermillion is on the coaching staff at Mizzou.

Paul Garvis and Paul Henley were guards who majored in chemical engineering. Garvis is with an oil company in Kansas City, Henley with the Monsanto Co.

Tackle Jerry Wallach is on the staff of the Missouri attorney general in Jefferson City. Guard Roger Phillips also is a lawyer. End Conrad Hitchler is playing pro football, and tackle Bucky Wegener, who played pro ball briefly, works for the Florida Wildlife Commission.

Don Wainwright spoke with almost as much pride of his former teammates' accomplishments as he did of his own helmet research designed to minimize future players' chances of having the close call he experienced three years ago this weekend.