

Roger Goodell laughs as Roger Staubach cracks joke about suffering six concussions while playing in NFL

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Roger Goodell needs to get his head examined.

The NFL commissioner let out a chuckle when Hall of Famer Roger Staubach cracked a joke about not knowing his name because he suffered so many concussions while playing in the NFL.

"I had a chance to sit next to the commissioner of football, Pete Rozelle tonight," Staubach deadpanned at the National Football Foundation awards banquet this week before being interrupted and corrected on the podium.

"Oh, excuse me, Roger Goodell," he said as the camera cut to the giggling commish.

"I apologize; I had six concussions in the NFL," Staubach continued, which drew more laughter from Goodell, who looked a little uncomfortable, at the ceremony at the Waldorf-Astoria this week.

Staubach, the legendary Cowboys quarterback, then played a little defense (and made himself look bad), saying that he told Goodell that he was going to tell "that corny joke and he approved it."

"Concussions are no laughing matter. It's demeaning. There 5.2 million Americans who have sustained concussions and many of them have sustained serious consequences because of concussions," Michael Kaplen, a New York attorney who specializes in brain-injury issues, told the Daily News. "If the commissioner is overtly laughing at a joke about concussions, he doesn't get it. He is out of touch with reality.

"It sends a message about what he really thinks about all this."

While Staubach's joke could be seen as being equally tone-deaf, Jennifer Smith, the director of player programs for PAST, a New Jersey physicians group that has treated former NFL and college football players who have struggled with traumatic brain injuries, defended the Cowboys legend.

"Roger Staubach is one of the classiest human beings I've ever met and he is serious about the concussion humor. This may have been an attempt to bring a little levity to a serious situation," she told the Daily News before cautioning, "But from a league standpoint, this should not be fodder for a cocktail party joke."

"If Roger Goodell wants to roll with it, that's probably not good judgment," she says.

Fifteen players appeared on Wednesday's injury report with concussions and, according to Frontline, there have been 140 concussions in the NFL this season.

Last month, the Rams appeared to ignore the NFL's concussion protocol by letting quarterback Case Keenum stay in a game against the Ravens after hitting the turf and showing signs of a concussion. The NFL has no plans to discipline the team.

The family of Giants legend Frank Gifford announced last week that he had CTE, a degenerative condition brought on by repeated blows to the head.

Researchers from the Department of Veterans Affairs and Boston University found that of the 91 former players who donated their brains to science, 96 percent showed signs of CTE.

The league reached a \$1 billion settlement with former players and their families and acknowledged that it expects about a third of its retirees will develop long-term brain problems. Many of the thousands in the class-action suit have opted out because it doesn't cover depression, seizures and mood disorders, which can be brought on by head trauma.

"Sometimes you need gallows humor to get through a degenerative disease. Players do this in our player-to-player sessions all the time and I think it is appropriate in that environment. But for Roger Goodell to laugh at this at a league event? I don't think Goodell showed good sense," Smith said.

Considering the evidence, a crisis manager would tell the \$44 million (or more) man that laughing at Staubach's joke is "bad optics."