

What is the future of football?

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On Tuesday night (Jan. 29), the rising voices of opinionated NFL experts and dedicated fans paused only for the sound of a speech synthesizer. Former New Orleans Saints safety and special teamer Steve Gleason, immortalized for his 2006 blocked punt in the first Superdome match-up after Hurricane Katrina, was one of several guests at [Tulane Hillel](#) for its latest “Big Issue” debate, “The Future of Football.”



During Super Bowl week in New Orleans, national sports experts (from left) George Atallah, Andrew Brandt and Mike Pesca debate football issues at a Tulane Hillel event. (Photo by Cheryl Gerber)

“I am curious to know why people think that reducing violence would reduce popularity,” Gleason, who suffers from ALS, said through the synthesizer. “The play-off system's parity, the top athletes going one-on-one, these are greater factors than violence that draw viewership.” Gleason received an MBA from Tulane University in 2011.

Lessening violence in the sport was one of many topics in the session featuring George Atallah of the NFL Players Association; Andrew Brandt of Moorad Center for

Sports Law and ESPN analyst; and Mike Pesca, NPR national sports correspondent. Gabe Feldman, director of the [Tulane Sports Law Program](#), moderated the debate.

Though much of the country has moved on, New Orleans football fans were eager to debate the ramifications of the NFL bounty scandal.

“Nothing happens in a vacuum,” Brandt said. “What else is going on, of course, is that there are 4,000 payers circulating the NFL with concussion lawsuits.”

Pesca agreed, arguing that without the recent spotlight on head trauma, news of the bounty system would not have evolved into a scandal. The debate later turned to concussion prevention and long-term player health.

Former Saints linebacker Scott Fujita explained that players' reluctance to report injuries stems from lack of job security. Fujita is a vocal advocate for player safety, yet has played through concussions and other injuries.

Brandt viewed it this way: “They're working day-to-day for so few positions that they're not thinking about what they're doing to their bodies 20 years down the road. How do we protect the players from themselves?”

Johanna Gretschel received a bachelor's degree with an English major from Tulane in 2012, and she is in the master's degree program.