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Bay May Require Patience on Road Back to the Lineup

By **JARED DIAMOND**

When Mets manager Terry Collins began his professional career in the early 1970s, baseball players didn't have "concussions." They had "headaches." They "took aspirins and moved on," Collins said.

But times change. Medical science progresses. These days, nobody in any sport would underestimate the magnitude of concussions, especially when they come in bunches.



Getty Images

Jason Bay suffered his second concussion in less than two years.

So when Jason Bay bashed his head into the left-field fence Friday—leading to his second concussion in less than two years—it immediately raised the question: Will he play again this season? And more important, should he?

"Forget about baseball. You're not worried about baseball," David Wright said. "You want him to get healthy because those head injuries are a scary thing. The baseball thing is on the back burner right now."

Bay missed the final two months of the 2010 season with a concussion after a similar incident with a wall at Dodger Stadium. After his injury Friday, he went on the special seven-day concussion disabled list and visited the doctor Monday. General manager Sandy Alderson said the Mets don't yet know

the severity of this concussion and that Bay will likely see a doctor again Tuesday.

The latest research regarding concussions suggests that Bay will likely play baseball again if he so chooses, according to Dr. Gad Klein, a clinical neuropsychologist at Long Island's Neurological Surgery, P.C.

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"There's no reason to believe that after two concussions two years apart his career is necessarily at risk," said Dr. Klein. "There's no evidence for long-term complications from two concussive injuries two years apart."

Nonetheless, Collins and the Mets players do not deny their concern for Bay, considering his history. While they all hope he returns to the team eventually, they also understand the potential danger involved.

Driving home from the ballpark Friday, hours after Bay's injury, Collins and his wife discussed the possibility that Bay may one day need to make a decision that puts his future quality of life over baseball.

"We sat there and we talked about what would we do in a situation like that if I was a father and a husband and looked down the road 15, 20 years," Collins said. "I don't know. I can't answer those things."

Even though Klein—who didn't examine Bay—dismissed the likelihood of this concussion causing long-term risk, he didn't downplay the significance of the injury. Klein said repeated concussions "can lower the threshold for susceptibility to another concussion."

In other words, if Bay returns, he could put himself at a greater risk for another concussion if he hits his head again. For somebody who plays as hard as Bay, telling him to stop running into fences in the outfield may prove difficult, if not impossible.

Catcher Josh Thole understands Bay's plight perhaps better than any other Met. Thole estimated that he has sustained three concussions of varying severity in his career, including one in early May that caused him to miss nearly a month. He in particular expressed his concern for Bay.

"I know exactly what he's doing right now: He's probably passed out in his bedroom in the dark," Thole said Friday. "Any time the light shines in your eyes, the noise, it's the worst."

Thole said he thinks baseball players can recover from concussions easier than other athletes—a notion Klein seconded. Klein said football and hockey players put themselves at a significantly greater risk of long-term damage because they take repeated blows to the head over a long period of time.

That said, there exists little doubt that baseball players treat concussions more seriously now than ever before. When Wright suffered a concussion in 2009, baseball did not have the seven-day DL, nor did it require certain tests and procedures before the player could return to action.

As for Bay, he and the Mets will find out in the coming days what his future holds.

"You have to be patient, and he knows that," Thole said. "But it's nothing you want to mess around with."

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