The first moment I came to fully confront the concussion I've faced these last few months was when my parents told my doctor they believed I was depressed.

In retrospect, I wish that I had never played football. I wish that I had never risked exposing myself to injury, and I wish that I had never had to deal with the consequences of my choices.

On October 11th, the first day that I was formally diagnosed with a concussion, I believed that I would recover and be cleared to play for the next football game two weeks later. My symptoms had improved drastically in just 48 hours, and I expected that I would begin the return to play protocols immediately. The protocol is quite structured; after 24 hours with no symptoms, one can return to basic activity. If this poses no problems, you can progress through basic drills, full practices without contact, and, eventually, a return to full play. The Sports Injury Clinic staff do an excellent job in guiding students through this process.

The return to cognitive activity process is similar. After being symptom free for 24 hours, one can return to basic cognitive activity, working from partial day participation to a full workload. Ms. McLean in the Centre for Learning oversees this process, with Dr. Kinneir, Sonya Pridmore, the health centre staff, and university counsellor consultation. The return to learn process is constantly praised by sports medicine specialists; every doctor I met with raved about the services and support offered by the team at UCC.

The vast majority of concussions are simple matters - students complete the return to play and return to learn processes, and are rehabilitated into the school. However, some more serious concussions contribute to a drawn-out, soul-crushing recovery. Five and a half months after my concussion on October 9th, I'm still not symptom free, and will never play a contact sport for the rest of my life. In addition, I have yet to finish all the IB requirements required for my diploma.

I lump the potential symptoms of concussions into 3 broad categories: physical, cognitive, and emotional. The physical symptoms are quite easy to describe, and consist of headache, pressure in the head, nausea, dizziness, sensitivity to light and sound, or neck pain.

The cognitive symptoms are more difficult to explain. The descriptions on the SCAT (sport concussion assessment tool) are: 'Don't feel right', 'feeling slowed down', 'feeling like in a fog', difficulty concentrating/remembering and confusion. I've found it to be extremely difficult to properly express how my cognitive symptoms impact me on a regular basis. I compare the cognitive effects of a concussion to being intoxicated, because in many ways they are similar. There's a feeling that you are not fully in control of your thoughts; they are swimming in an endless and vast ocean deep within your forehead. There's difficulty in controlling laughter, similar to the giddiness that many people feel when under the influence of alcohol. Sometimes when you're asked a question, or confounded by some riddle, you zone out. Even now, when asked particularly difficult questions by teachers, they are often answered with blank stares as my eyes dance around in circles. Cognitive symptoms are the most scary experience one can face. Imagine not feeling as though your brain is working properly for months at a time. These symptoms were, at least in my case, the ones most likely to lead to hopelessness, despair, and anguish.

Finally, there are the emotional symptoms. These symptoms include sadness, anxiety, trouble falling asleep, sleeping more than usual, irritability, and feeling 'more emotional than usual.' On the SCAT form I reported for 5 months that I was experiencing a 0 on a scale of 0 to 6 in each of these categories. It's difficult to express the emotional dilemma associated with self-reporting these symptoms.

I've faced extremely high anxiety over trivial matters, days with a handful of hours of sleep, and periods of immense sadness. Just when things were starting to go well in football, I was defeated. After spending 2 years training during the summer to get stronger and faster, I found that my time had been wasted for reasons out of my control. I had to quit debating, Model UN, OMP, Micro-Finance, and Football. I missed Avicii, Steward's, and other events. I barely spoke with friends for over 2 months. The emotional symptoms were crippling and made me furious at myself, the people around me, and life in general.

Without this confrontation from my parents (which coincidentally occurred only a few days before Michael Moriyama's speech in assembly) I would not have sought help. That's why, in this issues' spirit, I chose to write this article. Mental health and concussions have a serious impact on the school, so come out to upcoming mental health events and show your support.