

Toronto Star

Tony Dorsett, Dallas Cowboy's legendary running back, diagnosed with CTE

Dallas Cowboys great Tony Dorsett confirmed Wednesday that he's showing signs of chronic traumatic encephalopathy, a degenerative condition scientists have linked to depression and dementia.



/ AP FILE PHOTO

In this Dec. 18, 1977 file photo, Dallas Cowboys' Tony Dorsett (33) tries to get past Denver Broncos safety Billy Thompson, in the first quarter of an NFL football game in Irving,

By:Brad Townsend Dallas Morning News, Published on Thu Nov 07 2013

Dallas Cowboys great Tony Dorsett confirmed Wednesday that he has been diagnosed with having signs of [chronic traumatic encephalopathy](#), a degenerative condition that scientists have linked to depression and dementia.

“It hit me like a ton of bricks,” said the Pro Football Hall of Fame running back, confirming an ESPN Outside the Lines report that he and two other former NFL players were diagnosed with CTE after three months of brain scans and clinical testing at UCLA.

“Not a good thing,” said Dorsett, 59. “I’m looking at ESPN, and it (the news) is rolling across the ticker tape.”

The other players diagnosed, according to Outside the Lines, were Hall of Fame offensive lineman Joe DeLamielleure and former All-Pro defensive lineman Leonard Marshall. Another unidentified player was tested, but his results are not yet available.

Dorsett said that a UCLA researcher phoned him Monday in Dallas to give him the news. Last year, according to Outside the Lines, UCLA tested five other former players and found signs of CTE.

That was the first time researchers had found signs of the disease in living former players. The disease, which is shown by a buildup of tau, an abnormal protein that strangles brain cells.

“Don’t ask me what tau protein is because I don’t know exactly what it all is,” Dorsett said. “All I know is that before, (doctors) could only be able to find tau if you die first and they open up your brains.”

Dorsett, who has battled memory loss and depression for several years, is among more than 4,500 former players who are plaintiffs in a class-action lawsuit against the NFL. Last month, plaintiff attorneys and the NFL announced they had reached [a \\$765 million settlement](#), though it has not been legally finalized.

“It’s enlightening to know what I have, what I’m dealing with,” Dorsett said. “Now it’s time to find out, how can we can come back from it? I actually was told (by researchers) that it can be reversed. I was like, ‘What?’ They said, ‘Yeah, it can be reversed, slowed down, stopped.’ I’m like, ‘Oh, OK, so we need to get on out of here and get on that program immediately.”

CTE has no known cure, though according to the Outside the Lines report, researchers are hopeful that findings in Dorsett and others will lead to treatment. Dorsett said he already has been placed on a new nutrition and vitamin regimen.

“But I’m not being inactive. I’m being proactive. I’m trying to cut it off at the pass, slow it down, do whatever I can to fight this thing. But it’s tough, man, it’s frustrating as hell at times.”

Dorsett’s 15-minute phone interview was punctuated by long silences as he stopped in mid-sentence, searching for his train of thought.

Dorsett won the 1976 Heisman Trophy at the University of Pittsburgh and rushed for 12,739 yards during 12 NFL seasons, but nowadays he often can’t remember routes to places he’d driven for years.

“I knew something was going on. It takes me back to the fact that we (as players) were treated (after head injuries) and still put back out there in harm’s way, when from my understanding management knew what they were doing to us.

“They were still subjecting us to that kind of physical abuse without the proper treatment. It really hurts. My quality of life (long pause) deteriorates a little bit just about every day.

“But I’m determined to beat this.”