

U.K. commissions study of soccer's long-term mental-health risks



This file photo taken on November 18, 2017 shows Manchester United midfielder Paul Pogba attempting a header during a match against Newcastle at Old Trafford in Manchester, north west England, on November 18, 2017.

OLI SCARFF/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

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A major study into whether soccer players are at risk of degenerative brain disease was commissioned on Thursday amid concerns that the sport's authorities in England haven't done enough to tackle the issue.

The Football Association and Professional Footballers' Association appointed an independent research team, based in Scotland, to undertake a study entitled "Football's Influence on Lifelong Health and Dementia Risk" from January 2018.

"This new research will be one of the most comprehensive studies ever commissioned into the long-term health of former footballers," FA chief executive Martin Glenn said.

"Dementia can have a devastating effect and, as the governing body of English football, we felt compelled to commission a significant new study in order to fully understand if there are any potential risks associated with playing the game."

Researchers will address the question: "Is the incidence of degenerative neurocognitive disease more common in ex-professional footballers than in the normal population?"

The study should produce initial results within the next two to three years.

The issue regarding a potential threat of long-term brain damage to former players was given a bigger profile this month when former England captain Alan Shearer fronted a BBC documentary, in which he expressed concerns about the effects of heading a ball during his career.

The FA has been criticized for its apparent lack of interest into understanding whether heading a football is linked to dementia. Among those wanting more research undertaken is the family of ex-England and West Bromwich Albion striker Jeff Astle, who died in 2002 from brain injuries.