

# TRUTH

DOESN'T HAVE A SIDE

My Alarming  
Discovery  
about the  
Danger of  
Contact  
Sports

DR. BENNET  
OMALU

*with Mark Tabb*

Foreword by WILL SMITH

## Praise for *Truth Doesn't Have a Side*

If you want to understand Dr. Bennet Omalu, don't look at the acronyms that come after his name or read the papers he's authored; listen to his laugh. It's the laugh of someone who possesses the freedom that can only come when you know that you are doing *exactly* what you were destined to do.

*Will Smith*

The name Bennet Omalu is one that many people may not be familiar with. But if you are a current or former athlete, a wife or a significant other of an athlete, or a parent of an athlete who competes or has competed in a contact sport that could produce concussions, his is a name you *should* know. His discovery of CTE gave a name to a cause of a neurological condition that many former athletes suffered from later in life. For many former football players like me, Dr. Omalu is our hero because he was that one person astute and bold enough to dig deeper in his neuropathology research to discover the cause of neurological ailments that may have affected countless former athletes long after the cheering stopped.

*Harry Carson*, New York Giants (1976–1988), and a member  
of the Professional Football Hall of Fame, class of 2006

*Truth Doesn't Have a Side* is a critically important book. If you care about your brain or the brains of those you love, please read it.

*Daniel G. Amen*, MD, author of *Memory Rescue*

Dr. Bennet Omalu's tireless pursuit of the truth is inspiring, and being able to relive his journey alongside him makes it all the more incredible. The world is a better place with doctors like Bennet Omalu in it.

*Giannina Scott*, actress and producer

The world craves elite examples of courage from selfless crusaders who genuinely care first about the needs of others. Dr. Omalu is that man, and his story will inspire you and challenge the sleeping hero in each of us!

*Ben Utecht*, musician, former NFL player, and author  
of *Counting the Days While My Mind Slips Away*

*Truth Doesn't Have a Side* is a provocative, passionate, and enlightening discussion of football, forensic science, and religious faith. Dr. Bennet Omalu's research has focused much-needed attention on sports-related brain injuries. Whether readers agree or disagree with Dr. Omalu's dramatic conclusions, they will find his life story fascinating, highly informative, and truly remarkable.

*Dr. Cyril Wecht*, forensic pathologist and medicolegal  
consultant; past president, American Academy of Forensic  
Sciences and American College of Legal Medicine

*Truth Doesn't Have a Side* tells the remarkable story of Dr. Bennet Omalu's journey of perseverance in an imperfect world and his reliance on the absolute faithfulness of God. It is the story of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

*Father Carmen D'Amico*, pastor of Miraculous  
Medal Parish, Meadow Lands, Pennsylvania

# TRUTH DOESN'T HAVE A SIDE

My Alarming Discovery  
about the Danger  
of Contact Sports

DR. BENNET OMALU

*with Mark Tabb*

 ZONDERVAN®



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*To my wife, Prema,  
my daughter, Ashly, and my son, Mark—  
you are all I live for.  
I love you.*

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# Foreword

I used to love football. Some of my fondest memories came watching my oldest son, Trey, stretch for the pylon beneath Friday Night Lights. He was a wide receiver; I was a proud dad doing my best to keep from running onto that field myself. That's the nice thing about being a spectator: it's easy, when you're watching from the safety of the sidelines. One step forward, though, and the game—like life—has a way of hitting you in the mouth. But shock can be good for the system. Challenge yourself, and you'll likely be surprised at what you learn. And what did I learn from playing the role of a Nigerian-born forensic pathologist in *Concussion*? I learned what it means to be American.

If you want to understand Dr. Bennet Omalu, don't look at the acronyms that come after his name or read the papers he's authored; listen to his laugh. It's the laugh of someone who possesses the freedom that can only come when you know that you are doing *exactly* what you were destined to do. It was that laugh—not the accent, the body language, or the medical jargon—that I knew I had to capture if I hoped to do justice to Dr. Omalu and his legacy. And while many will cite his discovery of CTE as his lasting contribution, I choose to point to his fearlessness in the face of derision, exile, and skepticism. That courage is what is quintessentially American about Dr. Omalu: when everyone thought him a kook, a fraud, or worse, he persevered and held fast to what he scientifically knew to be true, at great personal and professional risk. Life punched him in the mouth, but he kept fighting. He endured that initial shock in order to bring closure to the grieving families of so many whose deaths would have otherwise gone ignored or misdiagnosed.

I still love football. Ironically, I have Dr. Omalu to thank for that.

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While Trey wore a helmet and pads and Dr. Omalu wears a white coat, they have something in common: day after day, they fought, yard by yard, to attain something they knew they deserved—a touchdown, or the truth. And what's more American than that?

Thank you, Dr. Omalu, for reminding me why I love this game, and this country.

*Will Smith*

## *Preface*

# God Did Not Intend for Human Beings to Play Football

Wherever I go, people ask me one question more than any other: “Dr. Omalu, is it safe for my child to play football?” The answer is simple. “No. It is not.” I believe God did not make human beings to play football, especially children. Full-contact football is not safe for children, nor do I believe football can be made safe for adults. Of course, an adult can weigh the risks and rewards of playing and make the decision for himself or herself. Children cannot do so, for their brain, mind, intellect, intuition, and understanding are not yet fully developed. As a society, we recognize this fact and do not allow children to smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol, or engage in other high-risk activities. We do this to protect children from themselves until they have the maturity to weigh the risks and rewards and make an informed decision for themselves. That is why I believe no one under the age of eighteen should be allowed to play football. Period.

Should adults play? I do not think so, but that is their decision. However, before any adult steps onto a football field, they need to understand that nothing protects the human brain from the force of impact experienced in full-contact sports. God did not design us for such impact. He did so for other animals. The woodpecker has a built-in shock absorber to protect its brain as it bangs into the side of a tree.

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Woodpeckers can play football safely. Humans cannot—not even with the latest state-of-the-art equipment. Helmets protect the skin and the skull and keep the skull from fracturing, but no helmet can ever provide complete cushioning for the brain.

Why does this matter? The brain, unlike most other organs that make up the human body, does not have the capacity to cure itself. Broken legs heal; neurons do not. When brain cells are damaged or die in both concussive and sub-concussive hits, they are gone. That is why I believe football can never be made safe, at least not in anything approaching the form of the game today.

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The next question I am asked is, “Why are you so against football? Why do you hate the game?” I plead innocence. I do not hate football. I have nothing against the game itself. My wife, Prema, grew up in Kenya and never saw an American football game until she moved to this country in 2001. Almost immediately she was captivated by the beauty and elegance of the game. I must admit, it is a beautiful game, albeit a violent beauty. When I see the sport through her eyes, I can see why so many millions love the game. It is a wonder to behold when it is played at a high level.

But I did not learn the game by watching it on the field or on television. My introduction to football came when one of the greatest players to ever play the game came to me, hoping I might be able to find the answer to why he died far too young and why he suffered so much torment the last years of his life. People thought he had lost his mind because he had lost his memory and frequently could not remember his way home. Mike also battled depression and other mood disorders. By the time I met Mike, he was addicted to drugs, had lost his intelligence, and could not hold his thought or engage in complex reasoning. In the end, he was bankrupt and homeless.

When Mike Webster died, people used respectful terms to describe his playing career, yet there was an underlying, almost a mocking tone

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that questioned why he made so many poor choices that ruined his life after he retired from football. I heard these people describe his life as tragic and a waste. Then I met Mike Webster on the autopsy table. When I met him, I knew I had to find the answers for the problems that plagued him. This was my calling, my duty as a fellow human being made in the image of God.

My search for answers and justice for Mike Webster introduced me to the game of football. Before I ever watched a single play on the field, I observed the toll the game takes on the human body, especially the brain. Mike Webster suffered from a completely preventable brain malady called Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy, or CTE. I say preventable because if Mike Webster had never played football, he almost certainly would still be alive today, and the two of us would never have had reason to meet.

So what do I have against football? Why do I hate the game? I do not hate it, but I hate the toll it takes on those who play it. Does that mean I am against football? No, not if you mean I am against adults exercising their God-given right to choose to play football. If someone knows the risks and chooses to play, God bless them. However, I would never play, and I would never allow my children to play, and I encourage my friends not to let their children play. My outlook might be very different if Mike Webster had been an anomaly, but he was not. I believe there is a very good chance that every person who plays (or has played or will play) in the NFL will suffer from some degree of CTE. Not everyone will suffer to the degree Mike Webster did, but some will be worse.

• • • •

The next question people ask is not really a question. It is more an accusation, hurled at me in anger. “Who are you, an outsider, an African—not even an African *American*—to cast such a cloud over America’s most popular sport?” When I first published my findings on the impact of football on the human brain, I was attacked. The National Football League accused me of falsifying my research. Some claimed I practiced voodoo,

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not medicine. The onslaught of attacks against me and my character grew so intense that I eventually lost my job, my dream home, and nearly everything I had worked so hard to achieve. Even today, my work is marginalized, and my role in bringing football's "brain crisis" to light has been dismissed.

"Who are you?" is the underlying question, the accusation, that follows me wherever I go. Does it follow me because of the color of my skin or because of the nation of my birth? Perhaps. But whatever the reason, I welcome the question. Who am I indeed? I've asked the question myself. Why was I the one who first discovered CTE in the brain of an American football player? Why was I the one who pulled back the curtain on the NFL's dirty little secret and forced it to deal with questions it sought to hide for many years?

Believe me, my life would have been much simpler if I had never met Mike Webster. I was living the American dream and counting my blessings every day to have such a wonderful life. I might have had to wrestle with the question of whether or not a child should be allowed to play football, but that would have been a personal decision for my wife and me in regard to our son and daughter. No one else would have cared about my opinion on the question, nor would I have felt qualified to give one.

But all that changed the day I met Mike Webster. It changed again when movie director Peter Landesman entered my life, and even more when Will Smith came to see me as he prepared to play me in the movie *Concussion*. Now I am the man people want to ask whether or not their children should play football. Why do they ask me? Who am I to answer such a question? That is why I am writing this book.

I never sought this life. God placed me here. I believe all that brought me to this place came as a direct result of the hand of God leading and directing my life. Who am I that the One who created the cosmos would bother with one so small? The answer is much larger than football.

## *Chapter Nineteen*

# I Wish I'd Never Met Mike Webster

**M**y phone rang one evening. I recognized the number as an attorney friend of mine—an assistant district attorney. We didn't have any cases on which we were working together at the time, so I wondered why he might be calling. When I answered, he was quite upset with me. "Bennet, I thought you told me you discovered CTE. How could you lie to me?"

"What are you talking about?" I asked. "How did I lie?"

"I'm watching television right now, and there is a woman from Boston University on the screen who says she discovered CTE. Why would you tell me you discovered it if she did?"

I was so shocked that I could hardly speak. "Who is she?" I asked. My friend told me her name. I had never heard of her. Then he told me the names of a couple of other people in the same news report. I recognized their names as people who had at one time partnered with me, Bob Fitzsimmons, and Julian Bailes to do research on the extent of CTE. Bob, Julian, and I had later parted ways with them. "They're lying," I told my friend. I briefly explained who these people were and how the break with them had come about.

After hearing my story, my friend became even angrier, but not at

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me. He seethed. “Oh my God, Bennet, you know what they are doing, don’t you?” he said.

“Taking credit for my discovery,” I said.

“There’s far more to it than that. You may not have grown up in this country, but there is a historical precedent to what they are trying to do to you. They want to replace your black face with that of a blonde-headed white woman with whom they are more comfortable,” he said.

“How can this happen in America?” I asked.

“I don’t know,” my friend said, “but it does. Things like this happen all the time. If there is money to be made—either through a product or through gaining research grants and then marketing the results—there’s a risk of this sort of theft of intellectual property.”

As sad and dark as my attorney friend’s assertions may seem, his assertions were confirmed several years later by the book and PBS documentary *League of Denial*. According to the book and documentary, the blonde white woman who claimed she discovered CTE was actually handpicked by Chris Nowinski and a man named Robert Stern from Boston University to examine the brains of football players after the Chris Benoit case and before the Tom McHale case. After my diagnosis of CTE in Tom McHale, a request was made by a family member for me to share the samples of the brain tissues with researchers at Boston University, and as a true scientist, I did so. But this group at Boston University went public with the results without giving me any recognition or acknowledgment whatsoever. To them I did not exist. Tom McHale was the first case of CTE in a football player announced by this group at Boston University.

When I hung up the phone, I muttered words I had begun saying a lot: “I wish I had never met Mike Webster. I wish someone else had been on duty the day he came into the autopsy room. I wish I had never fixed his brain and never had slides made and never looked at those slides under a microscope. I wish I had never started down this path that now consumes my life. I wish I had never met Mike Webster.”

But then I remembered that Mike Webster probably wishes he had

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never met me. I'm sure he wishes he had picked a different occupation, one in which he did not receive blows to the head over and over again, blows that robbed him and his family of himself. And I am sure Terry Long wishes he had never met me. I am sure he wishes he could reverse time and choose basketball or baseball or building houses or anything other than football as a career. The same is true of Andre Waters, Justin Strzelczyk, Chris Benoit, Tom McHale, and every person on the growing list of those I had tested who died from causes related to CTE. Not one of them wanted to die young. Not one of them wanted their brains to betray them and turn them into a person they did not recognize. I wish I had never met Mike Webster, and the feelings were surely mutual.

But God had brought us together. Just as Mike had suffered, now I had to go through a different type of suffering—one of humiliation and the loss of everything I had spent a lifetime building. Within six years of meeting Mike, I had lost my job, my dream house, and nearly my place in this country. My friendship with the man who was a second father to me, Cyril Wecht, was severely strained—I feared beyond repair.

There were days I told myself that if I had not found CTE in the brain of a former NFL player, sooner or later someone else would have. I tried to convince myself that if I had walked away from Mike, someone else would have taken up this cause and incurred the wrath of the NFL, its researchers, and the list of organizations and agencies in whom the NFL had its hooks through the funding of research. This other unknown researcher could have gone through the professional suicide I had to endure, not me. *Why did it have to be me?*

But then I remembered the promise I had made to Mike. And I also reminded myself that the reason no one else had discovered CTE is no one else looked for it, in spite of the large number of former players struggling with brain trauma-related symptoms. That's why God chose me as a servant, as an outsider who did not think like everyone about football and those who play it. God brought me and Mike Webster together. I could not deny this truth, even as I wished He had chosen someone else.



The woman on television taking credit for discovering CTE was just the latest in a string of humiliations that have continued to this day. They began with the NFL concussion committee's researchers demanding I retract my first paper. I should have expected their response. The powers that be reacted in the same way to the earliest studies that exposed the truth about dementia pugilistica in boxers, back when boxing sat atop the American sports scene. Doctors employed by the boxing industry systemically and systematically denied that boxing caused brain damage. I read one paper where a doctor with ties to the boxing industry claimed that boxing was no more dangerous than cycling or baseball.

While such a claim is obviously ridiculous today, people back then took it seriously. They did so because of the conformational intelligence of that day. Millions of boxing fans called it the "sweet science," which overlooked its brutality. At the time, it was one of America's favorite sports. When you are member of a group, the group influences your mentality, your presuppositions, and therefore your way of thinking and processing information, without you even being aware of it. You reach the same conclusion as the rest of the group, even when that conclusion is not supported by science. This occurs over and over with physicians connected to the sports industry. They become so intoxicated by the status, fame, and exclusivity of their connection to their sport that they become zombies without even realizing it. As someone who stepped in and observed this from the outside, I have thought this to be an interesting phenomenon.

The NFL medical researchers who attacked my research had the same conformational intelligence distort their perspectives. I do not know how else to explain how a member of the original NFL Mild Traumatic Brain Injury Committee, a neurologist with impeccable credentials, could go on national television and repeatedly insist that football causes no long-term risk of brain trauma. They denied my research, and even when they found they could deny it no longer, they denied me and my role in it. In the first conference the NFL convened to explore the long-term risks of

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brain trauma to players and the risks of CTE, they invited everyone to come and speak except me, even though I discovered the disease. They did not want to do anything to lend any legitimacy to me. To them, I am still today a nonperson they wish would just go away.

Yes, I expected the NFL to continue their efforts to humiliate me. I did not expect the same treatment from my colleagues who had no ties to the NFL. Before my first paper on CTE appeared in *Neurosurgery*, I presented it at an international meeting of the American Association of Neuropathologists (AANP). Even before presenting my paper, my experience with the AANP had been less than welcoming. I am not accusing the AANP of anything; I am simply stating my experiences and my perceptions from those experiences. When I went to an AANP meeting as a young neuropathologist, no one even extended the courtesy of talking to me, even when I initiated the conversation by saying hello. At one meeting I was standing by myself waiting for a conference to begin. One of my colleagues walked up to me and said, "Somebody spilled water on the floor over there. We need to get it cleaned up before someone slips and falls."

I looked at her with a very confused look. After several moments of awkward silence, I said to her, "I am a doctor here for the same meeting as you."

"I'm sorry," she said. "I thought you were part of the housekeeping staff." I've always wondered if this woman would have made the same assumption if I were white.

When I presented the Mike Webster paper, the AANP's reception was cold. I stood in the display hall next to the scientific poster of Mike, but no one asked me a question or commented on my research. Other doctors around me spoke of me in the third person as they stood right next to me as if I were not even there. Most of those who came by did not say anything with their mouths, but their body language spoke volumes. I felt very alone and very unwelcome, like an alien in an association of which I was a member. Not surprisingly, like an alien, I looked very different from everyone else in this meeting.

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That was my last time to attend an AANP meeting. Nearly a decade and a half has passed since I discovered CTE, a subject that has advanced neuroscience and has brought the work of neuropathologists into the international limelight. It should not surprise you to learn that the AANP has never invited me to give a talk about CTE to share my experiences and perspectives. That is not to say they have not had meetings to discuss CTE. They have had many. Yet they have never once asked the neuropathologist who discovered the disease to speak. Even after the release of the movie *Concussion*, they have continued down this path. They regularly issue press releases promoting other members of the association as the leading authorities on CTE, but they rarely mention me by name.

I've received the same treatment from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), a federal agency set up by the government of the United States of America. This is the agency the nation trusts to lead the way in biomedical and health-related research. Even though the NIH has been very involved in brain trauma and CTE research the past several years, they have never reached out to me or even acknowledged my existence. Over the years, I have applied to them and other affiliated organizations for grants for my research, but I have always been turned down. Why? I do not know. Apparently my reputation at the NIH is not good. A close friend of mine, a fellow African, called me one day very distraught after attending a meeting with an NIH executive. My friend told me that the executive said she did not trust "that African doctor"—that is, me. She did not know me. She had never worked with me. She had never even talked to me, and yet she had already made a decision about my competence. My friend urged me to go public with the story, but instead I entrusted this battle to God. He knows the truth, and His truth will prevail.

Not surprisingly, it has been revealed that part of the NIH's funding for CTE research comes from the National Football League. In my opinion, I do not believe officials of the NIH or the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) should serve in any capacity on committees of organizations and corporations like the NFL and pharmaceutical

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companies. And when they leave the NIH or FDA, they should not be allowed to serve on such committees or work in such corporations until after five years.

The humiliation from the NIH was not just in the distant past. In 2015, I received a call from a very good friend of mine—a well-established and successful attorney. He said, “Bennet, have you seen the news today?” I said no. He told me the NIH put together a panel of neuropathologists from across the country to identify the neuropathological criteria for the diagnosis of CTE. He said he expected to see my name on the top of the list, but he scanned the list and did not see it. He asked if I had not been invited to the panel. I said no, that I was not even aware that the NIH was putting together a CTE panel. He was very upset and said that we could not stand by and continue to let this happen in the United States, that this was a very big slight to me. He wanted to do something. Again, I remembered that God fights my battles for me. I told him not to worry about it—that I have seen worse, and it did not bother me. Besides, I did not want to be part of a conformational group of neuropathologists. Where were they when I was discovering CTE? Many, if not all, of the members of that panel were the same members of the AANP who had excluded me. Some of them were the ones who continue to deny that I discovered CTE. I consoled my friend, and he calmed down before we hung up. I teased him, talked about other injustices in America, and hung up on a lighter note.

After I hung up, I had the same thought I have had so many times about not meeting Mike Webster. I would have been left alone. I could have just led my quiet life of faith and enjoyed the simple things of life. But God had other plans.

In spite of the treatment I have received from the AANP and the NIH, others have embraced me. Along those lines, I must give great credit to the College of American Pathologists, the American Association of Physician Leadership, and the American Medical Association, all organizations of which I am also a member. They have embraced me and my work, in spite of what others have said about me. I respect them

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very much, for they have treated me with dignity and respect—dignity given not because I am black or white or green, but because of the science behind my research and the impact of my research. That is the way it should be.

The NIH was not the only government entity that acted as though I had nothing to do with the discovery of CTE. Around the time the NFL held the conference to which they did not invite me, the Congressional Judiciary Committee held a public hearing to look into CTE, which was organized by Michigan congressman John Conyers. This hearing was the first of its kind. The commissioner of the NFL was called to speak, as were some doctors from Boston University. One of Congressman Conyers' assistants contacted me to formally invite me to the hearing. However, two days before the very highly publicized meeting, the same assistant called to tell me my invitation had been rescinded. He had no explanation when I asked why.

After I hung up the phone, I sat down and wept. *Even the United States Congress is ostracizing me*, I thought. *Why? What have I done?* It seemed like, since I was not yet an American citizen, I had nothing to contribute. This just struck me as contradictory to everything I ever believed about America. We are a nation of immigrants. Everyone came from somewhere else. I was not yet officially a citizen, but I was on the pathway to citizenship. I loved America, and yet this made me feel very much like the feelings were not mutual. Let me be clear: I do not think this was purely an anti-immigrant stance. Instead, I believe that in the hearts of those who made the decisions about the congressional hearing, my presence would have made everyone very uncomfortable, because I had essentially forced this situation on Congress. Bennet Omalu, a newly arrived American, had called into question the most American of sports—the sport that is intertwined into the culture, society, and identity of America. As Alec Baldwin (playing Julian Bailes) said to Will Smith (playing me) in the movie *Concussion*, in America “God is number one,” which he said while holding up two fingers, and “football is number two,” holding up one finger.

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I also believe a large measure of my being shunned came because I had embarrassed those who should have discovered CTE long before I ever conducted Mike Webster's autopsy. The leading neurological and neuropathological researchers in the best academic and research centers in the country did not discover something that should have been very obvious for at least as long as football players wore plastic helmets and turned what should have been a piece of protection into a weapon. When I discovered the tangles of tau proteins in Mike Webster's brain, I was just three months out from completing my fellowship in neuropathology. No one with so little experience should have made such an important discovery. Discoveries like this should be made in the finest research hospitals and universities by middle-aged men with decades of experience. It seemed that the discovery by someone like me embarrassed them, and if I were to be invited to come to their hearings and meetings, my very presence might have reminded them of how they were failing the players they proclaimed to love and admire. No one wants to feel that level of discomfort. It was easier for all involved to pretend I did not exist, to render me a nonentity.

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The problems with the AANP and Congress and the NIH and all the rest were just beginning in 2007, which proved to be a very, very difficult year. Dr. Cyril Wecht had been indicted the year before and had subsequently resigned from the Allegheny County medical examiner's office. In the last chapter, I wrote about the difficulties I had with his replacement. As time went on, the tension in the office grew more pronounced. Finally I knew I had no choice but to resign my position. This decision placed me in a difficult spot. I had long since started the process of working toward becoming a United States citizen. That had been my goal from the time I arrived in Seattle. I fell in love with America from the start, especially after I moved to New York and experienced the wonderful diversity that makes America what it is. In spite of our flaws, this is still the place

## *Truth Doesn't Have a Side*

where people are the most free to pursue God's perfection within them and to become whatever we want to become. Where else but in America could my story be told, along with the stories of scores of others who have experienced the American Dream here?

However, I still had many years left before I met the residency requirements that would allow me to become a citizen. For me to maintain my visa, I had to have a job. When I quit the medical examiner's office in Pittsburgh, the clock started ticking. If I did not find a job in six months, I would be deported with no hope of returning. Up to this point, I not only had continued to work; I had also continued to pursue every educational opportunity I could reach for. My father had preached to me the power of education, and I took his words to heart. While in Pittsburgh, I completed two fellowships, earned a master's degree in public health, and another master's degree in business administration from one of the top business schools in the world—Tepper School of Business at Carnegie Mellon University. I eventually earned five board certifications in five subspecialties of medicine. I was busy.

However, all my work would be for naught if I did not find a new job. Resigning from the medical examiner's office was one of the hardest decisions of my life. Prema and I were building a nice life here. Work on our "million-dollar dream home" was nearly complete. We were expecting our first child. Prema had finished her education and had opportunities to work if she wanted. Life had come together for us in Pittsburgh. We were living the American Dream. But now everything was in doubt.

And then one of the worst moments of my life happened. I was at church on a Saturday morning getting the sound system ready for a funeral service. The matriarch of a prominent African-American family in Pittsburgh had passed away, and her funeral Mass was at St. Benedict the Moor. The church was going to be full, and many important persons would be attending the Mass. Father Carmen counted on me to take care of so many things. My phone rang, and it was Prema. She sounded distraught on the phone. "What's wrong?" I asked.

*I Wish I'd Never Met Mike Webster*

“I’m bleeding,” she said.

I dropped everything and rushed home. I picked her up and took her to the closest hospital’s emergency room. In a short time, our worst fears were confirmed: She had a miscarriage. I was devastated, not just because we lost the baby, but by Prema’s pain. I did not want to see her suffer. She is such a lovely, reserved, down-to-earth person—simply an angel. To see her sobbing broke my heart. I wept too. Prema did not deserve this. I held her and promised her that it would be okay. God will bless us with another child very soon.

After a couple of hours, the hospital released us, and we went home. I called a close friend to come and assist us since we had no family in Pittsburgh. It was just Prema and me. I sped back to church to make it on time for the funeral Mass. We could not let Father Carmen and the mourning family down. We had to be there for them. During the Mass, I prayed that the Holy Spirit would descend upon Prema and grant her peace in this time of trial. She was too good a person to suffer this pain. God answered our prayers sooner than we expected. To Him be all praise.

## *Chapter Twenty*

# Finding Life in the Wilderness

**O**n August 17, 2007, Prema and I said good-bye to the city we had grown to love and good-bye to the dream home in which we would never live, and we moved as far away as we could from everything connected to football and the NFL. I had accepted the position to become the new chief medical examiner of San Joaquin County, California. I almost missed out on the opportunity. Several unsolicited calls came to me in Pittsburgh from a Captain somebody from a funny-sounding place in California. Since I did not recognize the name or the number, I ignored the call. So many angry phone calls came to our home that I had grown weary of even picking up the receiver. That might have been the end of it if a friend and colleague, a man who served as a resident under me while I was a fellow in neuropathology at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, had not called. “Bennet, a guy from California is trying to reach you. He says he has called you many times, but you do not return his calls.”

I immediately became defensive. “Oh, do you know this guy?”

“Yes, Bennet. I’m the one who gave him your number. He wants to hire you,” my friend said.

“Hire me? For what?” This shows how jaded I had become in the midst of all the attacks I had endured connected to my work on CTE.

# ***Truth Doesn't Have a Side***

## **My Alarming Discovery about the Danger of Contact Sports**

By Dr. Bennet Omalu

Dr. Bennet Omalu's alarming discovery about the danger of contact sports began in a morgue with the body of former Pittsburgh Steeler and hall of famer Mike Webster. Webster's body looked to Omalu like the body of a much older man, and the circumstances of his behavior prior to his death were clouded in mystery. When Dr. Omalu studied slides of Webster's brain tissue under a microscope, it was at this moment that the world of contact sports changed forever: the discovery of Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE).

At the center of the controversy that followed this shocking discovery stands the unlikely Dr. Bennet Omalu, a Nigerian-born American citizen, a mild-mannered, gentle man of faith. Dr. Omalu began his life in strife, growing up in war-torn Nigeria. But his medical studies in forensic pathology proved to be a lifeline. It fed his natural curiosity and awakened within a deeper desire to always search for the truth.

*Truth Doesn't Have a Side* explores the life of this gifted neuropathologist, his discovery of CTE, and his battle against those who would silence him. Be inspired by this incredible story that is changing the course of high-impact sports and could change the course of sports culture forever.

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