

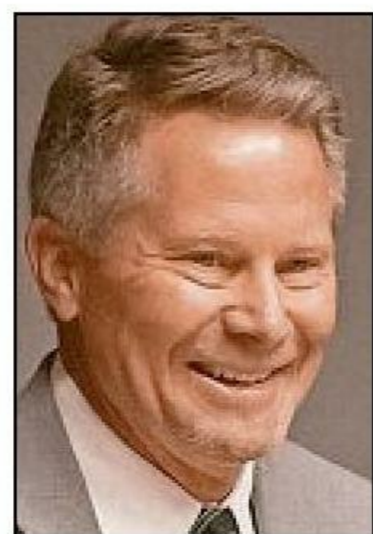
UM, MSU experts are allies in concussion fight

Researchers from rival schools are authorities on head trauma injuries

BY CONNOR EAREGOOD
The Detroit News

East Lansing — Just a couple decades ago, concussions were thought of as invisible injuries shrouded in mystery. Today, they're more visible than ever, thanks to advancements in athletic medicine and public awareness.

At the heart of those developments are two people, a teacher and a student, who led research on the topic in its early days. And now, they just so happen to be



Guskiewicz

on opposite sides of a bitter football rivalry. When he was just a third-year professor at North Carolina teaching sports medicine, Kevin Guskiewicz was looking for students to work in his lab, where concussions and sports-related brain injuries were a focus. One of his students, Steven Broglio, took up his offer.

"I started hanging out in his lab just to hang out, have a place to be, and then did a research project, and I was on my way at that point," Broglio told The Detroit News.

That was 1998. Now both Guskiewicz and Broglio are among the world's leading concussion researchers, two academics who have shaped the conversation around concussions and sports-related brain injuries.

Taking a career path in administration, Guskiewicz is in his second year as Michigan State University president, while Broglio is in his seventh as the director of the University of Michigan's Concussion Center and NeuroTrauma Research Laboratory. And though both of them want their school to win this Saturday's rivalry football game between Michigan and Michigan State, the two

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also emphasize the collaboration between the state's leading universities.

"We have written more papers together than I can count," Guskiewicz told *The News*, "and been on more committees and shared the podium more times than I can count."

Concussion treatment has come a long way since Guskiewicz first started studying them as a student at Virginia. Under David Perrin, Guskiewicz had started out studying the way balance can be used as an assessment for recovery from musculoskeletal injuries. Then Perrin came back from a 1993 conference and said he should pivot his research into a burgeoning field — concussions. With increased funding flooding into the field, Guskiewicz pivoted his research and got a big nod of trust from the National Athletic Trainers Association.

"We got funded for about \$15,000 and we thought we were rich," he said. "Which is hard to believe how much it's changed."

Early on, concussions were almost entirely ignored as an injury. Players would go back into games or practices after taking a hard hit to the head. The difference in treatment between head injuries and other injuries stood out to Guskiewicz.

"I was perplexed by how little we knew about concussions at that time," he said. "We'd pull a player out of a game with a knee injury and hold him out for two or three weeks. There were times where with a suspected concussion — it looked like the player maybe was recovered, or perhaps they hadn't even had a concussion — they'd go back into the same game or go back in the next day, because we just didn't have enough information about how to diagnose and manage them."

Years later, Guskiewicz served on the NFL's Head, Neck, and Spine Committee, which created the modern concussion protocol. It drew from research he and Broglio conducted across various academic stops, including their start at North Carolina, where they crossed paths with a men's soccer goalkeeper named J Batt who participated in their testing. Batt is now Michigan State's athletic director, hired by Guskiewicz in June 2025.

It's hard to pinpoint why Broglio got into concussion research. His family didn't have a history of concussions or brain injuries, but he really enjoyed the structure of the research. He likens it to a puzzle, with one white dot in the middle surrounded by a field of black. It's his job, along with other researchers like Guskiewicz, to put those pieces together.

Eventually, Broglio went his own way, getting a master's degree from the University of Pitts-

burgh and a doctorate from the University of Georgia. Those moves came with the encouragement of Guskiewicz.

"There's a bigger world out there, and you need to challenge yourself and get into new experiences and see things through a different lens," Broglio said. "And I think he was good at framing (that) there's a sort of value to both, but you're going to get more if you're a little uncomfortable for a little bit."

Guskiewicz had no doubts about what Broglio might be capable of accomplishing.

"I knew that he was going to be a superstar in the field, and he certainly has been," Guskiewicz said, pointing out Broglio's role with the NCAA-U.S. Department of Defense Grand Alliance for Concussion.

Broglio was the first of the two to get a stake in the Michigan-Michigan State football rivalry. After working for five years at the University of Illinois, he came to Ann Arbor in 2011 to work as director of the NeuroTrauma Research Laboratory.

Broglio's move came at a seminal time for the field. In January 2007, concussions and CTE made the front page of the *New York Times* when reporter Alan Schwarz reported on the death of former NFL player Andre Waters from brain damage. Also reported at the time were the traumatic brain injuries suffered by veterans from IED explosions during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. Broglio calls this the start of the modern era for concussions and blast exposures.

Funding from the NCAA, Department of Defense and National Institute of Health poured into concussion research, and the topic became one of the biggest in sports. Especially football, where stories of CTE and concussions — some of them sensational — created a lot of buzz, especially from concerned parents whose children played contact sports.

The concussion topic had plenty of local interest, too. In 2014, Michigan coach Brady Hoke reinserted quarterback Shane Morris into a game against Minnesota after stumbling from a helmet-to-helmet hit. The decision contributed to Hoke's firing as football coach, which then brought in Jim Harbaugh to lead the program.

Broglio started the UM Concussion Center in 2018, seeking to create a more holistic center than others in the country.

"There are some centers that are really phenomenal at the research component, or phenomenal at the clinical component, or phenomenal at the outreach component, or maybe two of those components," Broglio said. "But nobody really combines all three of them. And I think that's where we've been most successful was kind of working across those three different cores and really integrating, thinking about every-

thing we do across those three cores."

Alongside concussion centers at Stanford, Mayo Clinic and Massachusetts General Hospital, UM's center is one of the leading programs in the country.

"They were smart to invest in that line of research," Guskiewicz said. "That was not an area of focus for them at the time, but I think they realized they had a superstar there, and that he'd be able to really make a name for himself and for UM in this space."

And though he is in charge of his own program, with his own curious students, Broglio still thinks back to the lessons Guskiewicz taught him at North Carolina.

"The fact that I was able to get in when I got in, and kind of teaching me the basics of research, the passion for it, it's that foundation that supports everything I do on a daily basis," Broglio said.

Guskiewicz remained a founding director of UNC's Matthew Gfeller Sport-Related Traumatic Brain Injury Research Center. In the early 2010s, Guskiewicz sat on the NCAA and NFL committees regarding concussions.

"They've come a long ways, and that's why the concussion protocol was put in place," Guskiewicz said. "It's never been safer to play contact sports than it is today, because we know how to identify the injury and track it over time to determine when that athlete is ready to go back safely. And there's been a trickle down because of the research, a lot of the work that Steve's done."

Guskiewicz also took on more administrative roles at North Carolina, becoming senior associate dean for natural sciences at the College of Arts & Sciences. After a three-year stint as dean of the same school, Guskiewicz became interim and then full-time chancellor at UNC, a role he kept for four years before coming to Michigan State in 2024.

Now, Guskiewicz and Broglio find themselves on both sides of a rivalry that has taken an increasingly sour tone the past three years. But both are more worried about the way each university collaborates off the field.

"Yes, there are a lot of competitions on the playing fields and the basketball courts and the soccer fields between Michigan State and UM," Guskiewicz said. "Those happen maybe a dozen times a year, but the remaining 353 days of the year is a partnership, because these are two great research universities."

"We've got to find even more ways to partner together to advance the science, whether it's in biomedical research, advanced manufacturing, agriculture, technology and advancing technology. And I'm committed to doing that, and Steve, I'm proud to have him there as a partner."

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