

My Three Concussions

Thrice now I've had what the medical guys call mTBI (mild traumatic brain injury), i.e. concussions. Mountain biker + martial arts student, so that shouldn't be all that surprising. Two weren't especially noteworthy; the third was (and potentially life-altering).

#1: The Dumb One

My best friend was captain of our high school wrestling team. Since I come out of a martial arts background, back then (we're both too old now) whenever we were together we'd find ourselves rolling around like a couple of bear cubs. Even when place and time wasn't necessarily appropriate, like his college freshman dorm room. He attempted a throw – I wasn't ready for it and landed... on my face. Oops.

#3: The Bad One

We'll skip ahead to this one. It wasn't so much the concussion that made it bad, but the concurrent spinal fracture.

And yes, it involved two-wheeled contraptions in the woods.

It was at Great Glen's 24-hour race in 2015, which was (until they resurrected it a couple years back) the last one of many. It wasn't my first, so I wasn't unfamiliar with the race or course. And a racer I'm not: just before this happened, I had been lapped by the race leaders, which meant they were finishing their SECOND lap and I hadn't finished my FIRST. So I'm puzzled by what happened. I don't remember any of it – what I do remember is stopping (!) to talk to the race monitor, then next thing... I'm in an ambulance on the way to Androscoggin Valley Hospital.

Best I could figure: I dumbly grabbed the brakes and went over the bars. My helmet likely saved me, as they often do:



The upshot: concussion and spinal fracture, which would keep me in a rigid collar for three months. But the process of treating that fracture revealed that I had a rip-roaring case

of degenerative disease, something I'll be contending with the rest of my days.

#2: The Funny One

(To the extent a concussion could be "funny" anyway.) Martial arts again. It was a Jeet Kune Do class. Guro Ron (well, Sifu Ron in this context) couldn't be there to teach it, so one of his assistants was subbing. He was having us do a warmup consisting of a game whereby we stood in a circle and passed a medicine ball back and forth. Someone tossed the ball to the guy next to me... but he missed it and it rolled behind us outside the circle. The sub retrieved it, and decided it would be fun to loft the ball – this is a heavy medicine ball, remember – over the circle to the other side...

...but he didn't get enough LOFT on the ball. He beaned me in the back of the head instead, and down I went. I'm not sure how long I was out – I don't think long – but they tended to me off to the side while the rest of the class went on to something else.

Your brain gets really screwy when it's been sloshed around in your skull. Things looked very... not black and white, but high contrast or something. I went home, then next morning – not having the sense I was born with – decided to go to AM Kali class. And we were drilling disarms with live sticks (and bats and tire irons). And doncha know I paid VERY close attention to where that weapon was, knowing if it hit my head it would be REALLY, REALLY BAD.