

Football and Hearing Issues Came Together for the Super Bowl

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There were a lot of hearing angles to the 2014 Super Bowl, played last Sunday in New Jersey. For one thing, there was the Seattle Seahawks' much heralded (and much criticized) "12th Man," as the team's incredibly noisy legion of fans came to be known. As noted by ASHA's Joe Cerquone on the Hearing Views [blog](#), the din created by these fans at Seattle home games has been measured at up to 136.6 dB.

This may have helped inspire the home team while discombobulating visiting teams, who have jumped offside at an unusually high rate. The Seahawks have won 17 of their past 18 home games at CenturyLink Field, the best home record of any team in the National Football League (NFL) over the past two seasons. On the other hand, it's virtually certain that fans who failed to wear effective ear protection to the games have been paying a high price for their team's success in the form of tinnitus and hearing loss.

On a happier note, Seattle backup fullback, Derrick Coleman, has become a hero for his remarkable [personal story](#). Despite having had profound hearing loss since early childhood, Coleman defied the odds and the naysayers. First he became a football star at UCLA and then, despite going undrafted and being released by the Minnesota Vikings, he refused to give up. He won a spot with the Seahawks, and also became a star of a YouTube [video](#) sponsored by Duracell Batteries, which has been viewed more than 18 million times.

Hearing Care Organizations Join the Party

Coleman's inspiring story also caught the attention of Oticon, whose U.S. headquarters in Somerset, NJ, is just 40 miles from East Rutherford, where Super Bowl XLVIII was played.

Recently, 9-year-old Riley Kovalcik, a hearing aid wearer from Roxbury, NJ, wrote to Coleman, telling him he was an "inspiration" to her. Her letter and his heartfelt response captured nationwide media attention. So, Oticon brought Riley and her twin sister, Erin, to pre-game media events. There they showed their support for Coleman's team by wearing their Seahawks blue-and-green Oticon Sensei hearing aids.

Meanwhile, the day before the big game, Derrick Coleman joined a host of pro athletes and other celebrities at a service mission sponsored by the Starkey Hearing Foundation and hosted by the New York Yankees at Yankee Stadium in New York. The running back, who attended the event with his parents and sister, volunteered and received a new pair of hearing devices.

Other volunteers at the event included active and former NFL stars Larry Fitzgerald, A.J. Green, and Tommie Harris; the TV actor Daymond John; Yankee manager Joe Girardi; the singer Garth Brooks; and Barbara Bush, daughter of former President George W. Bush. During the two-day mission, more than 100 people were given hearing aids.

Gallaudet Gridders Win Hearstrong Award

While Derrick Coleman is one of the few NFL players who wears hearing aids, a whole team of college players with hearing loss was honored the day before the Super Bowl by the [HearStrongFoundation](#). The foundation, which is sponsored by EarQ, celebrates individuals worldwide who have “not only faced hearing loss, but conquered it with a determined spirit, a focused mind and an unwavering heart!”

At an NFL Players Association event held February 1 event in Manhattan, the Gallaudet University head football coach, Chuck Goldstein, and the team’s five senior co-captains, Ryan Bonheyo, Nicholas Elstad, Mike Hantge, Chris Langan, and Adham Talaat, accepted the HearStrong Foundation’s Champion Award on behalf of the whole team.

Last fall, the Gallaudet gridders had their best season ever, qualifying for its first-ever NCAA Division III playoff game.

And Then They Played

After all the hoopla, the Seattle Seahawks and the Denver Broncos finally played the game on February 2. And, as you may have heard, Seattle won 43–8. The 12th Man couldn’t take credit for this one, as most of the seats were filled, not with Seahawk and Bronco fans, but with relatively quiet folks who had the right connections to get tickets.

While he didn’t get to carry the ball, Derrick Coleman did make a mark. Playing on Seattle’s special teams, he raced downfield on the opening kickoff and made a hard tackle on the Bronco return man at the 14. He seemed to be telling Denver that it wasn’t going to be their day.