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As Bills tight end Kevin Everett continues to make a remarkable recovery from what appeared to be a catastrophic injury, we were fortunate enough to reach one of the nation's top neck and spine specialists, Dr. Robert Watkins, of the Centinela Freeman Spine Institute in Marina Del Rey, Calif.

Over the past 30 years, Watkins has consulted some of the world's top professional athletes. He won't disclose his list of patients, but quick research revealed his work with Chiefs running back Priest Holmes, who's attempting a comeback after a spinal column injury in 2005.

Watkins, who spent 16 years at the famed Kerlan-Jobe Clinic in Los Angeles, was a consultant for the Rams and now USC.

He's spent the last several years working with the National Athletic Trainers' Association on the best ways to transport injured athletes from the playing field. One of the biggest questions trainers have faced is how to remove a helmet when dealing with a potential neck injury. Trainers usually end up removing the facemask first, but Watkins talked about how crucial those early moments are.

"I think the way the Buffalo trainers and doctors reacted immediately is a huge part of why this young man is making such remarkable progress," Watkins said. "The surgeon's rarely down there on the sideline, so the trainers must've done an unbelievable job."

In the moments following the injury, Watkins said doctors had to quickly evaluate the severity of the injury.

"A lot of times athletes go into spinal cord shock," he said. "At that point, it's difficult to determine if the damage is complete. If you have an incomplete lesion, then you still have a chance."

He said the technique used to put Everett into a hypothermic state on the field was a relatively new one. Doctors injected ice-cold saline solution into Everett's spinal column, which helped alleviate some the swelling.

Watkins also works with the NATA on how to prevent these types of injuries. Like coaches, they sit in darkened film rooms and watch dangerous collisions. He's collected a lot of information, but the main message in tackling is still "see what you hit." Leading with the crown of the helmet has led to many catastrophic injuries, according to Watkins.

He said that former USC and 49ers great Ronnie Lott was a perfect example of someone who had proper form.

"I see him a lot at games, and I've watched all those highlight tapes," Watkins said. "I never once saw him lower his head. He always used proper form, and he's a great example for young players.

Later, we'll hear Dr. Watkins' take on Everett's long road to recovery.

Kevin Everett, Ronnie Lott

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Matt Mosley

Matt Mosley, an award-winning writer for The Dallas Morning News for seven years, joined ESPN.com in January 2007. Mosley, a Baylor graduate, writes columns, features and blogs for ESPN.com.

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