

GAME CHANGERS

IN THE LAND OF 10,000 INNOVATIONS, VISIONARIES FROM THE GREATER MSP REGION ARE CHANGING THE WAY SPORTS ARE PLAYED.

Profile: Player's Health

Tyrre Burks knows how injuries can change the trajectory of a football player's career. A wide receiver at Winona State University, his talents allowed him to become part of the elite 1.9 percent of NCAA football players to go on to play the sport professionally.

PROFILE > Player's Health and founder Tyrre Burks

TYPE > Tech start-up business

STORY THEMES > Sports tech
Youth sports
Sports injuries/concussions
Venture capital
Entrepreneurship

OVERVIEW > Sports tech startup Player's Health empowers the parents of youth athletes, protects leagues and clubs, and most importantly helps players get appropriate care and monitoring of injury when they play. The system integrates with popular league registration and management systems, so parents can see and act on any incidents involving their child. Coaches use a mobile app to log incidents and give return-to-play options to parents. The business, founded by a former pro football player, moved to Minneapolis/St. Paul to join the region's unique sports tech hub.

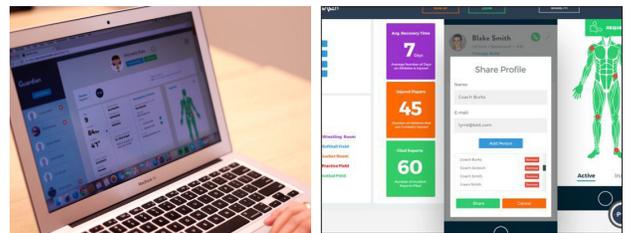
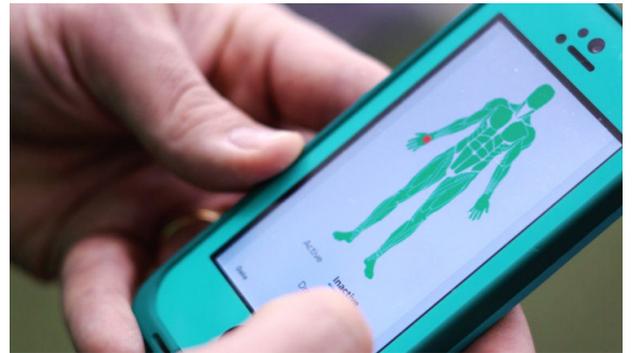
KEY PEOPLE > Tyrre Burks, founder and CEO

KEY QUOTE > *"In Minnesota, kids come first. The culture of youth sports is so rich. For business, the community is really rich too."*
- Tyrre Burks

WEB SITE > playershealth.com

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Profile: Player's Health



Tyrre Burks knows how injuries can change the trajectory of a football player's career. A wide receiver at Winona State University, his talents allowed him to become part of the elite 1.9 percent of NCAA football players to go on to play the sport professionally, first in the Canadian Football League and then in Europe.

He never caught on with an NFL team despite working out for teams, and believes a history of injuries was part of the reason why.

In Burks' case, however, that career trajectory change could be a boon for the next generation of athletes. After leaving football, Burks founded Player's Health, a networked platform being used in youth sports leagues to help ensure player injuries are documented and treated correctly.

"Throughout my career, I struggled with injuries," he said, noting that even playing for sophisticated organizations like college and pro teams it was hard to track every incident, treatment and outcome. "I thought, if my communication with my sports organization is so difficult, how is it for kids?"

FINDING FERTILE GROUND FOR A SPORTS-TECH START-UP

Tyrre founded Player's Health in Chicago, but decided to move the business – and his family – to Minneapolis/St. Paul after a visit convinced him that the market was well-positioned to help him grow.

"People embraced us," he said. "The tech community may not be as large here as some other cities, but it's tight." Local tech mentors connected Tyrre to Minneapolis-based SportsEngine, a youth sports team registration, scheduling and data-management platform that had grown into a leader in the field. "I walked in, and there were 300 people selling into youth sports organizations."

SportsEngine has become a nexus for many sports-tech startups, and partners with Players Health and other businesses whose missions align. Player's Health is offered to SportsEngine's customer base, so a close working relationship is valuable.

In addition to those synergies, Tyrre found the Twin Cities a good place to build a business. "If you're looking for a million dollars, you can find it here," although bigger rounds of funding will often come from traditional tech capital sources elsewhere.

Burks found a cultural benefit comes with Minnesota money: "Investors here know how to run a business," he said. "You're going to go through due diligence here that's much more rigorous. You have to build to last. You're going to earn that money if you raise it."

What that meant for Player's Health was developing a careful business plan and running a tight ship operationally. "The investors at series A and B were blown away" by how professional and mature Players Health was as a business when it came time to seek more funding.

Finally, "the culture of youth sports is just so rich here," Tyrre said. "Kids come first."

HOW PLAYER'S HEALTH HELPS PROTECT KIDS AND TEAMS

Burks describes Player's Health as a clinical risk management platform. Leagues and clubs who opt into the system can piggyback on SportsEngine's registration. Each player has a profile created, is assigned to the correct team, and the coach has a mobile app he or she can use to log incidents.

The coaches – many of them volunteers – are not making diagnoses. "If something happens, the coach just says this happened at this time on this surface, things like that," Burks said. "The coach isn't saying 'He ruptured this tendon,' it's more like 'Johnny hurt his leg bad enough to stop play, here's what I saw and you might want to get it looked at.'"

The app helps make sure proper protocols are followed as far as removing kids from play, and parents are notified. The parents can then use that information to seek whatever medical care or advice is needed, and parents are required to clear the child to play again.

This protects the youth leagues, as most lawsuits related to youth sports injuries relate to the mismanagement of return to play. Part of Player's Health's business comes from insurance companies that represent sports organizations, who help underwrite some of the cost to motivate their clients to adopt the system.

It also protects the kids by making it clearer when they should be removed from the game, and makes sure parents know what happened and what the next steps are.

"Another thing this helps with is chronic issues," Tyrre said. "Does a player have diabetes? How do you tell the coach, and do they know what to do in an emergency? This captures all of that. Currently, if I'm a volunteer coach, a lot of times I don't even have emergency contact information for the family. With Player's Health, that's automatic."

AN AWARD FROM GOOGLE AND ONGOING GROWTH

In 2016, Player's Health was chosen by the local COCO co-working community (where Player's Health was located) to represent the Twin Cities at Google's Demo Day. Player's Health took the top prize that year, helping boost its visibility as it sought additional financing.

With business growing rapidly, Player's Health is moving into new space in Minneapolis and growing its team. Today, more than 80,000 athletes are on the system and more than 3,500 incidents have been documented.

As youth sports injuries, especially head injuries, continue to gain attention, the potential for growth is tremendous, said Tyrre. But even more than the business opportunity, he is excited to be helping families feel more empowered and confident about their children's well-being. "The thing we hear from parents is, 'it's about time.'"

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