



For the first time, research has confirmed that scientists successfully detected chronic traumatic encephalopathy -- known commonly as CTE -- in a living former professional [football](#) player.

Scientists detected signs of the dementia-like disease in former player Fred McNeill four years ago, but it's not possible to confirm CTE until after a patient's death. McNeill died in 2015, and confirmation he had the disease was made last week in the journal *Neurosurgery*, [scientists said Wednesday](#).

"The importance of this one today is that this is the first time to have a scan which shows brain degeneration of CTE in a living person and then to have that person die and it correlates with the autopsy," Dr. Julian Bailes, a neurosurgeon at NorthShore University in Illinois, said.

Research found the presence of tau, a protein that forms around damaged neural cells, in 14 retired players using a brain scan -- including McNeill, who'd been under observation for exhibiting symptoms of CTE.

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