

“ I was an outsider and I was nobody. People didn’t take me seriously, but it was a good thing for me,” Omalu said. “ They laughed at me and ridiculed me, but it gave me the space to do what I had to do without anyone noticing. It was a good thing I wasn’t taken seriously because by the time they had noticed, I was too far into it. It was too late.”

Since finding CTE — a degenerative brain disease found in people who have suffered repeated blows to the head — in Webster’s brain, the disease has been discovered in nearly 90 former NFL players including Hall of Fame linebacker Junior Seau. The former San Diego Chargers standout was 43 when he committed suicide in 2012.

Omalu said he isn’t “ anti- football,” but admits that even with the popularity of the movie ‘ Concussion,’ he still has major hurdles to overcome in order to keep educating the public about the dangers of the game.

“ The NFL wasn’t really my obstacle, to be honest with you. My biggest obstacles are the consumers of football,” Omalu said. “[Football] has been intimately interwoven into the cultural fabric and cultural architecture of this society. “ It’s what I call conformation of intelligence. Even the smartest of the smart people conform to a certain way of thinking. There’s a fascination and intoxication with football in this society. No one can deny that. It’s just like if someone is intoxicated with some drug. It obliterates rationality.”

One drastic difference between the early 2000s and the present, according to Omalu, is the reception he receives regarding CTE. He said people are at least starting to listen.

“ The first thing was the denial, but the good thing I’m seeing is that the message is starting to percolate,” Omalu said. “ That’s why I’m here and all over the country. People are gradually beginning to recognize it. Because of that, there are now questions. Sometimes questions are defensive, but people are beginning to talk about it and engage it, which is a good sign.”