

THE Waiting Room



Brain Game

Five years ago, a leading Japanese neuroscientist created controversy with his research asserting that videogames impede brain development in kids. How ironic, then, that a videogame targeting their parents and grandparents is now transforming this obscure professor into an international celebrity.

Not only did Ryuta Kawashima, M.D., help develop the hot new videogame based on his brain imaging research, but he actually stars in it.



UNLIKELY HERO
McElwain savors achievement on the court and off.

HOLLYWOOD ENDING — AND BEGINNING

Here's the kind of story Hollywood scriptwriters dream up: team manager comes off the bench to score 20 points in the last four minutes of his only varsity basketball game. This story, though, features a Hollywood twist that's stranger than fiction: the hero has autism.

No wonder it's now the stuff of real-life Hollywood legend. This April, two months after being triumphantly carried off the court on his teammates' shoulders, Jason McElwain reached a deal with Columbia Pictures to produce a movie of his life story.

Backstory: McElwain didn't begin talking until he was 5. Although he still lacks social skills at 17, his special education teacher reports that he's learned to cope well.

"I'm not really that different," McElwain says. "I don't really care about this autistic situation. It's just the way I am. The advice I'd give to autistic people is just keep working, just keep dreaming, you'll get your chance and you'll do it."

McElwain's chance came when he was rewarded for his dedication as team manager by getting to suit up for his

Rochester, N.Y., high school's last regular-season game. Taking the floor in the waning minutes, he promptly missed his first two shots. Then he caught fire — sinking six 3-point shots.

"This is the first moment Jason has ever succeeded and could be proud of himself," his mother, Debbie McElwain, said that night. "I look at autism as the Berlin Wall — and he cracked it."

Considered too small to make even the JV squad as a 5-foot-6 senior, he became a big man on a campus suddenly deluged with inquiries from

parents of children with autism and other developmental disorders. Overnight, he became something of a national hero.

In March, he met with President Bush, who admittedly wept upon seeing the grainy highlights of McElwain's performance on the network news shows. In late April, McElwain appeared as a guest on "Oprah." The next day, he met with the producer of his film: one Magic Johnson.

"I don't care who plays me," McElwain says, "as long as it's a great movie."

With a happy ending, no doubt.

As 5 million players work their way through mind games designed to stimulate the brain, they're coached by an animated version of Dr. Kawashima.

The real Dr. Kawashima was approached by Nintendo after finding that functional MRI scans showed videogames don't use the prefrontal cortex, which controls creativity, memory and communication. Based on his findings that mental challenges build brain power, he explored developing a game to exercise those frontal regions. He spent five months working with programmers in his lab, attaching electrodes to gamers' heads and using scans to determine which puzzles most activated the brain. He found increased brain activity when people were performing simple math calculations and reading aloud.

The result just hit U.S. stores in the form of a Nintendo game called "Brain Age: Training Your Brain in Minutes a Day!"

"I wanted to make a contribution through my findings: to tell the world that you can train the brain," says Dr. Kawashima. "But I didn't think it would be this big."

REMEMBERING A TRUE CHAMPION

The world took time in May to remember a gentle champion who, sadly, could no longer remember himself.

Floyd Patterson, boxing's first two-time world heavyweight champion, died of prostate cancer at 71. But for at least the last eight years, he suffered from Alzheimer's disease — the latest in a long line of ring legends to develop dementia.

His cognitive impairment became public during a 1998 deposition when he was unable to remember the names of family members, coworkers or the fighters he'd beaten.

That saddened fans because he was among the sport's most sensitive souls. After knocking out Ingemar Johansson to

regain the title in 1960, Patterson delayed his own celebration to help his opponent to his feet.

In the mid-80s, Patterson began showing signs of dementia, often forgetting the names of people he'd known for years. By the mid-90s, however, it was clear his affliction was more than mere forgetfulness. Even when he was appointed chairman of the New York State Athletic Commission in 1995, it was an open secret he was no longer capable of handling the job. After leaving it three years later, he lived quietly in New Paltz, N.Y., occasionally volunteering as a youth counselor at a juvenile correction center.

Floyd Patterson leaves behind a legacy that, to all but himself, was truly unforgettable.

—WALLACE MATTHEWS



GENTLE FIGHTER Patterson brought class to a savage sport.

DANCING WITH THE CANINE STARS

Carly, the golden retriever pictured here taking "Dancing with the Stars" winner John O'Hurley for a whirl, gives new meaning to the phrase Man's Best Friend. Especially if that friend happens to suffer from seizures.

Carly, a seizure-response dog specially trained to partner with epilepsy patients, filled O'Hurley's dance card at the Epilepsy Foundation's

recent gala in New York City. O'Hurley, whose sister died from a seizure after she stopped

WHO'S LEADING? O'Hurley plays the sidekick.



taking her epilepsy medication, was on hand to present the foundation's Distinguished Achievement Award to UCB Pharma Inc. for its innovative programs to help epilepsy patients and their caregivers.

Not the least of those programs is Canine Assistants Partnership.

Canines that provide assistance shouldn't be confused with dogs that predict oncoming seizures. Dogs that can

supposedly predict seizures will, for example, lick the palm of a person to warn him or her of an oncoming seizure. In contrast, canine assistants are response dogs that perform such services as retrieving a phone prior to a seizure, summoning help in a controlled environment and staying with the patient during a seizure.

Thus do canine assistants instill confidence by enabling people living with epilepsy to return to normal daily activities they may have been reluctant to do.

Just like the best of friends.