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Mustaine feels Peyton Manning's pain

[VISIT WATKINSSPINE.COM](http://VISITWATKINSSPINE.COM)By Roger Lotring
Special to ESPN.com

As Super Bowl week media coverage built to a fever pitch, some breaking news finally answered the question that beleaguered Indianapolis all season: Peyton Manning had been medically cleared to play.

Dave Mustaine, the frontman for heavy metal



Megadeth's Dave Mustaine has to keep the head-banging to a minimum after neck surgery.

group Megadeth, understands the Indianapolis quarterback's prolonged recovery from a cervical neck fusion. Mustaine underwent the same procedure, which was performed by Dr. Robert Watkins, the same surgeon who operated on Manning.

Uncertainty about the future after a potentially career-ending injury is a mind game, Mustaine says, for both an MVP quarterback and a guitar hero. "There's that self-doubt. What am I going to do -- what *can* I do?"

Mustaine's chronic pain was caused by stenosis, the result of decades of onstage head-banging. Mustaine tried to cope with the pain for nearly 10 years through acupuncture, yoga, trigger-point injections, and both narcotic and non-narcotic medication.

"It got to the point where I just didn't want to live like this anymore," he says.

The breaking point came just days before the historic Big 4 show -- Metallica, Slayer, Megadeth and Anthrax -- at Yankee Stadium last September. Mustaine's son found him crawling on the floor in debilitating pain, a hand elevated in a desperate attempt at relief.

Mustaine, with the help of some doctor-prescribed steroids, powered through the show but knew it was time to address the injury.

Like Manning, Mustaine is a franchise quarterback whose shoulders carry an entire organization and the people it employs. He also knows how the physical and mental anguish of a major injury can be trivialized

by media and fan scrutiny, and how masking the pain without surgery creates a false sense of hope. He says, "It makes you think, is this not really that bad? Am I making a big deal out of nothing?"

Megadeth returned to the road in January to support its new album, "Thirteen." Four months post-op, Mustaine is cautious, following his doctor's limits about pushing himself onstage. At the Yankee Stadium show in September, there were reminders written on strips of tape on the stage floor cautioning him not to bang his head.

Mustaine's empathy with the burden of an NFL passer isn't limited to Manning. Mustaine, a born-again Christian, says he's paid close attention to the meteoric rise in popularity of virtuous Broncos quarterback Tim Tebow. And he likes it.

"There are so many kids looking up to him now, instead of shaking their butt around and doing the vulgar dancing," he says. "You've got all these ridiculous dances guys do after a tackle. What's worse, a guy getting down on his knee and praying?"

"What happened to good, old-fashioned smash-mouth football?" Mustaine adds. "That was one of the few sports you could count on for clean-cut athletes. Now, it looks like half the people playing are girls because they all have long hair."
