



Torn ACLs No Defeat for All-American Wrestler

Lake Catholic wrestler Joe Tymoszczuk went to the National High School Wrestling Championships last March, defeated four state champions, earned fourth place nationwide and was named All-American.

Just think what he could have done with more than two weeks of practice.

Against-the-odds success was nothing new for Tymoszczuk, who qualified for Ohio's state wrestling championships last year — on one leg.

"We were in a scramble, and my foot stuck to the mat. My knee twisted and I heard a big pop," tells Tymoszczuk, 19. "I felt major pain, and I couldn't straighten my leg. The [athletic] trainers wrapped my knee, and 40 minutes later I was back on the mat, trying to stay off my leg. It hurt, but I won the match and qualified for state."

But Tymoszczuk didn't go to the state championships.

"Joe's ACL, the anterior cruciate ligament that connects the femur [thigh bone] to the tibia [shin bone], was torn and needed to be reconstructed," says sports orthopaedist James S. Williams Jr., M.D.

One knee surgery down

Dr. Williams, who reconstructs 70 to 100 ACLs each year at Cleveland Clinic Sports Health and Orthopaedic Surgery at Euclid Hospital, arthroscopically removed Tymoszczuk's torn ACL, threaded a new one through holes in his femur and tibia, and used screws to secure it. Tymoszczuk's new ACL was made from his middle patellar tendon and parts of his patella (kneecap) and tibia.

Pain from the one-hour outpatient surgery wasn't as difficult for the active Tymoszczuk as much as the slow rehabilitation, which typically takes six to nine months.

"At first, the [physical] therapist stretched my leg and helped me with leg presses. After about three months, I started light jogging," he says.

Exactly six months after surgery, Tymoszczuk took the field for his senior year as a linebacker on Lake Catholic's football team. According to Dr. Williams, he was a "human wrecking machine" for about 18 minutes, then got blindsided by an offensive lineman. Tymoszczuk heard a familiar pop and felt a familiar pain — this time in his other knee.

Another knee surgery to go

"I knew right away it was my ACL," says Tymoszczuk, who also knew it meant the end of his football and wrestling seasons.

But he wouldn't quit. With the help of Lake Catholic's wrestling coach, Jack Mulhall, Tymoszczuk petitioned the National High School Coaches Association and was granted a wild card spot at the National High School Wrestling Championships that spring, allowing him to bypass the regular season and state championship qualifiers.

Another surgery and six months of rehab later, Tymoszczuk was healthy enough to begin wrestling — only two weeks before nationals.

Success on the mat!

Without so much as a practice roll on the mat in more than a year, two weeks of intense training with his coaching staff and other area coaches was all he needed. Tymoszczuk finished with a 7-1 record,

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national honors and plenty of attention from college scouts. He accepted a wrestling scholarship from Ohio University, where he now attends, majoring in sports marketing.

He anticipates no long-term effects from his ACL reconstructions.

“He just needs to stay super-strong,” says Dr. Williams. “Athletes can never be too strong, too fast or too flexible. That’s the best way to prevent ACL injuries — although often they’re caused just by being in the wrong place at the wrong time.”

According to Dr. Williams, a pop, pain and a swollen knee are signs to see a sports medicine specialist. “Eighty-five percent of the time, it’s a torn ACL,” he says. “If you keep playing, you risk damaging your knee even more. So don’t ignore it!

“With surgery and therapy, you can expect a full recovery.”

Ranked Among Best in Nation

Cleveland Clinic Sports Health is a cornerstone of the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery, which has a long history of excellence and innovation in medical and surgical care. For the past several years, *U.S. News & World Report* has consistently ranked the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery among the top five orthopaedic programs in the nation.



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