



Rocky road to recovery

Photos by Laura Clark



By Anders Rotto
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With bodies flying around the field, ankles flexing in order to gain traction on the turf field and arms bracing for violent impact on the ground, many soccer and football athletes are bound to experience injuries of different variations over the course of a season. Unfortunate as it is, injuries are simply part of sports. However, the most crucial part of injuries is not how the injury occurs, but rather how the athlete responds to such devastating adversity.

This year alone, four Thunder women soccer players and four Thunder football players have all experienced torn ACLs. The ACL is one of the cruciate ligaments in the knee. Other common injuries are concussions, back pain, pulled ligaments and broken hands. By far the most

frustrating, however, is a torn ACL, due to the intense and lengthy recovery process.

Junior forward for the women's soccer team Sarah Frey tore her ACL a little over a week ago and identified her specific recovery plan that is fairly common across all athletes with ACL injuries. She went under the knife for surgery about a week after the injury and is currently utilizing a knee brace and crutches. She also uses a cryo cuff cooler in order to effectively ice her knee. The cryo cuff is essentially a small cooler of cold water that can be attached to the knee brace through a hose. It pumps the cold water around the knee in order to complete the icing process.

Two weeks after surgery, most athletes are able to start walking with the brace, but without crutches. Six weeks after surgery, the athlete is usually able to begin walking without a brace. During this timeline, the athlete must complete an extensive amount

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of physical therapy in order to strengthen the ACL. The therapy is aimed at reacquiring the knee's range of motion and strengthening the surrounding muscles in the athlete's quad and hamstring.

After the athlete is able to walk without a limp, he or she is able to begin jogging about 10 to 12 weeks after the initial surgery. Once the athlete can jog without a limp, the next step is to practice cutting and changing directions. They practice accelerating and decelerating with the proper body mechanics in order to reduce the risk of the injury reoccurring. Finally, six months

after surgery, the athlete is able to begin playing with contact on the soccer or football field with teammates.

The physical recovery process is only half the battle, however. Oftentimes, recovering mentally from such a disheartening injury is harder than the actual physical therapy itself.

"ACLs are tough injuries because a lot of times they happen doing something like cutting which you've done a million times before and the one time something goes wrong you tear your ACL," Frey explained. "In order to get back on the field,

you just have to try your best to forget about that and remember how much you love to play. I try not to take any second I get to spend playing for granted."

Frey is not alone in those sentiments. The other seven Thunder players who find themselves experiencing a similar recovery process must also learn to move on and forget about the past in order to positively impact their future. Depending on their commitment and their work rate, many players are able to complete full recoveries and join their teammates on the field during the following year's campaign.

"It's definitely frustrating to miss out on post season games because that's my favorite part of the season," Frey said. "I was definitely excited to get surgery done and over with, though, so that I can be on the road to recovery and getting ready to have my best season yet as a senior."