



Back in the Game

For someone who loves sports as much as Desley does, an ACL injury can be devastating. A second one can seem like the end of the world. Desley, a freshman at New Richmond High School, is a veteran of two ACL reconstructions.

It's a common experience, especially for female athletes. Studies have shown that they are three to eight times more likely to sustain an ACL tear than their male counterparts.

Desley's first ACL tear occurred in November 2011, when she attended a basketball camp as an eighth grader. "I was guarding one of the varsity players," she recalls. "We both jumped up and I went to block her shot. When we came down, we made knee-to-knee contact. I stepped funny and my knee just blew out."

After surgery and six months of physical therapy, Desley returned to the sports she loves — but not for long. During a summer basketball game in July 2012, she tore the ACL in her other knee. "I got a pass and I went to do a dribble drive to the hoop," she recalls. "Once you tear one, it's easier to tear the other. I was babying [the first knee] and so I just stepped weird and it just went. I knew right away."

Desley started therapy at Westfields Hospital immediately after surgery, and after a slow beginning, she progressed quickly.

ACL injuries run in Desley's family. Her older brother, Derek, suffered an ACL tear the summer before his junior year at New Richmond. And Desley's mother, Lisa, sustained a torn ACL in her youth. "It's something that my family has accepted that we have to deal with," Lisa says. "But I can't say enough about Dr. Weiss, his team and the all-inside technique he used to reconstruct Desley's ACL. The procedure is less invasive

so her scar is very small compared to her brother's. And she seems to have more mobility. She doesn't get as stiff as Derek did — and still does."

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Since her second surgery, Desley has been working hard at her recovery. "She's been doing her own workouts in addition to physical therapy," her mother says. "She's been running, shooting baskets. She's been on the bike and treadmill. I can already tell, she's like a different person. She's happier."

Physical therapy has been critical to Desley's recovery. Desley started therapy at Westfields Hospital immediately after surgery, and after a slow beginning, she progressed quickly. The physical rehabilitation staff also designed an independent program for Desley to do at home to improve stability and confidence in the knee. "I fully expect her to be ready to get right back in when she gets final clearance from her doctor," says Brian Lease, physical rehabilitation manager for Westfields Hospital. "For Desley, education has been just as important as rehab. Hopefully this will prevent further issues down the road."

As of April 1, Desley's surgeon, Nicholas G. Weiss, M.D. of St. Croix Orthopaedics, P.A., and Medical Director of Orthopaedic Services at Westfields Hospital, has given her the go-ahead to resume team sports. Desley is planning to try out for varsity softball. "Already, she is so stable. It's just incredible. It's exciting to watch her," her mother says. "I am so pleased and thrilled that she has the



Nicholas G. Weiss, M.D.



opportunity to continue to do the things that she absolutely loves. Dr. Weiss told Desley they were going to get her back to what she wants to do. And she believed him.”

Desley advises other athletes with ACL injuries to use their recovery time wisely. “What I had to figure out was that I couldn’t look at the negative,” she says. “I had to focus on what is going to come – that I will be stronger and I will be better. I thought it would be the end of the world not to be able to play sports for six months. But even though I wasn’t playing, I would be there for my team. I realized that I needed to use the down time to focus on what it will take to be a good teammate and leader and work hard to achieve those goals.” ■



Advanced care for ACL tears

T The anterior cruciate ligament, or “ACL” for short, is a ligament that helps to stabilize the knee. An ACL tear is a serious injury, according to Dr. Weiss, who treated Desley at Westfields.

“Most ACL injuries are non-contact injuries,” Dr. Weiss explains. “About 70% occur when someone pivots or lands from a jump. There are a number of people who have this problem. Women in particular are up to eight times more likely to have an ACL tear. So we see a lot of female athletes with this injury.”

Dr. Weiss is one of just a few specialists in the nation to treat ACL injuries with a sophisticated, “all inside” reconstruction technique that achieves excellent results.

“It’s an effective, minimally invasive procedure that recreates your ACL anatomy better than previous surgeries,” Dr. Weiss says. “There’s less tissue damage. We found that patients tolerate it better. It’s not as painful, particularly in the early stages. And it’s biomechanically better. The classic reconstruction was okay but it didn’t fully recreate the anatomy of the ACL. With this technique, we’re able to recreate the anatomy very closely.”

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After surgery, patients undergo six months of physical therapy to gradually regain strength and mobility. “The rehab is important,” Dr. Weiss says. “There’s a lot of hard work to be done afterwards. As far as getting back to activities, the standard is patients can start jogging at about three months and usually can return to unrestricted activities — jumping, cutting, and pivoting — at about six months. It is a long process but it’s well worth it.

Because this ACL reconstruction technique is so new, Dr. Weiss is doing a study to measure its benefits. “This procedure is new enough that there’s not great data out there,” he says. “So far, while we don’t have everything tabulated, it’s looking excellent. Just about every one has been successful. We’ve done 50 or so. The overall success rate for ACL reconstruction is about 90 to 95 percent. We anticipate with this newer technique it’s going to improve.” ■