

Red Bank Catholic's Anderson an inspirational student athlete

7:16 PM, May 5, 2012 | 1 Comments

Uhfpr p hgg

7; #h#r#s#d#h#f#r#p#h#g#g#k#l#h#h#k#h#l#w#r#h#r#c#u#h#h#g

Uhfpr p hgg

7;

Tweet

0

0

A A



Red Bank Catholic senior Ryan Anderson warms up before a game at Long Branch. / TANYA BREEN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Written by **Sherlon Christie** @sherlonapp

FILED UNDER

Sports
High School Lacrosse
Red Bank Catholic

[Buy Tickets](#)

The only thing keeping Red Bank Catholic senior attackman Ryan Anderson from a lacrosse field right now is mononucleosis and he's expecting clearance from his doctor to resume playing soon.

About a year and eight months ago, Anderson, then 16, wasn't sure he would play sports again, nevertheless his spring sport of lacrosse, after suffering a Traumatic Brachial Plexus injury during a football scrimmage on Sept. 1, 2010 at Manasquan High School.

"It was the second kickoff. I ran down the field and this big hole opened up and the running back was coming right through the hole with the ball. I tackled him and my legs were planted at the time and all the energy went into my shoulders," Ryan Anderson said. "My right shoulder compressed too far down and popped five nerves out of my

spinal cord and paralyzed my right arm from the shoulder down. I knew something was wrong immediately because as soon as I hit the ground, it felt like my shoulder had burst into flames."

The injury

According to New York University's Langone Medical Center's Department of Neurosurgery's website, Anderson's injury was defined as: "The brachial plexus (brachial means arm and plexus mean communication or meeting point) refers to the nerves that exit the cervical spine and pass down to the shoulder and arm. Five major nerves comprise the brachial plexus: C5, C6, C7, C8, and T1 (C refers to cervical [or neck] and T refers to thorax [or chest]).

These nerve pass under the skin in the neck and axilla, where they are vulnerable to injury. When the neck and arm are forced away from each other during trauma (e.g., car accidents, motorcycle accidents, falls) the brachial plexus nerves can be stretched or torn apart. If the force is severe, these nerves can even be pulled away from the spinal cord where they originate. Damage to these nerves causes pain, numbness, and weakness in the shoulder, arm, and hand. The pain can be quite severe, and is often described at burning, pins and needles, or crushing. In general, the C5 nerve controls the rotator cuff muscles and shoulder function, C6 controls flexing the arm at the elbow, C7 partially controls the triceps and wrist flexion, and C8/T1 controls hand movements."

One of Ryan's friends, senior Doug Whitlock, who plays football and lacrosse at Red Bank Catholic, was right next to him during that kickoff play.

"It was a good four seconds after the ball was kicked and Ryan ran into the kid at full speed. Ryan flew backward and the kid also flew backward," Whitlock said. "After it happened, all I could hear was Ryan screaming that he couldn't feel his arm and he couldn't feel the right side of his body."

Whitlock said the training staff rushed over to attend to Ryan after the injury and later Ryan was transported to the hospital by an ambulance.

Ryan's parents Suzanne and Kenneth Sr. were not at the scrimmage when Ryan got hurt but thanks to technology found out very quickly.

"I had got a call from the football staff but I was on my way out of my office and the call went to voicemail," Suzanne Anderson said. "One of the players on the football team, texted my middle son Patrick, who then called my husband Kenneth Sr. and that's how we found out about Ryan's injury."

Suzanne said that Wednesday afternoon on Sept. 1 2010, one of the assistant football coaches met the family at the hospital. Later at the hospital the emergency room doctor's liaison said there were no fractures but they were running more tests.

"We were eventually told that he had a Traumatic Brachial Plexus injury," Suzanne Anderson said. "There was no talk at that moment about playing sports again."

The diagnosis

The Andersons did their research about traumatic brachial plexus injuries and were set to have surgery in December 2010 at the Hospital for Special Surgery in New York City, which was recommend by a local orthopedic doctor. The surgery was described as a 14-hour procedure and the success of it wouldn't be known for months, if not years.

Then another option came into the picture as the Andersons found out about the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota and a visit to the Mayo Clinic was scheduled just before Christmas 2010.

"Originally, we were going to have the surgery done at the Hospital for Special Surgery in New York City but then we found out about the Mayo Clinic," Ryan Anderson said. "It turned out that my dad's buddy knew a guy who had the same injury as me and he said to go to the Mayo Clinic to have the surgery. That was probably the best choice I made."

Ryan eventually had two major surgeries first in February 2011 and then again in April 2011 that cost about \$150,000 according to Suzanne Anderson. The surgery Ryan had is called a “Double Gracilis Free Muscle Transfer” and Mayo Clinic’s website described it as a two-staged procedure: “In stage I, the first gracilis transfer, powered by the spinal accessory nerve, restores elbow flexion and finger extension. In stage II, a second gracilis transfer, powered by intercostal motor nerves, expands function to include finger and thumb flexion (grasp).”

“The Mayo Clinic told us before the surgeries that it would be 18 months before Ryan gets elbow flexion back and three years before he gets finger flexion back,” Suzanne Anderson said. “He’s definitely ahead of the curve.”

The recovery

The decision to have the surgeries at the Mayo Clinic was all up to Ryan Anderson.

“After my surgeries it took about six weeks before I could actually pick up a lacrosse stick again,” Ryan Anderson said. “Then once I got my doctors out in Minnesota to clear me, I was out playing lacrosse again.”

The Mayo Clinic doctors that Ryan is referring to are the three-person “dream team” as his mother calls them of Alexander Y. Shin, M.D, Allen T. Bishop, M.D. and Robert J. Spinner, M.D. In addition to the trio, his mother also credits his local doctor, Dr. Harry A. Bade of Professional Orthopaedic Associates for their combining efforts that gave her son a chance to play sports again.

“I’m naturally left-handed so I can still write and draw. I can still do almost everything I use to do before the injury,” Ryan Anderson said. “It takes a little adapting to one hand and I figure things out as I go along.”

Ryan, the youngest of Suzanne and Kenneth Sr’s three sons which also include Kenneth Jr., 22, and Patrick, 20, got clearance to resume playing lacrosse about two weeks before the spring season started, according to Red Bank Catholic boys lacrosse coach Ryan Eichner.

“Ryan played junior varsity lacrosse as a freshman and he was a junior varsity and varsity lacrosse player his sophomore year,” Eichner said. “He was definitely a potential starter for us for his junior year before his injury.”

Ryan is a tri-captain, which was voted on by his teammates, this season for the Caseys. Eichner describes him as the fourth attackman on the team, basically he’s the first attackman off the bench. He played in the team’s first four games and he has scored one goal this season before his getting Mononucleosis.

Ryan is scheduled to see his doctor this week about his Mononucleosis and hopes he’ll get clearance to resume playing lacrosse in time for Red Bank Catholic’s postseason run. His lacrosse teammates, his coaching staff and his family are glad to see him playing lacrosse again because about 20 months ago he suffered an injury that changed his life.

“My husband and I pray every day that Ryan didn’t break his neck and we didn’t have to bury him,” Suzanne Anderson said. “He realizes how lucky he was that day.”