

Pediatric emergency

Expert care helps boy's recovery

At the tender age of 11, Zach Holmes of Monticello is probably going to “retire” from playing football. Chances are you might too if you had been through everything Zach has experienced in his short life.

In August, Zach was playing his first game of tackle football. It was the annual football jamboree in Manchester. Zach was the starting quarterback and threw a pass in his third play of the game when he was hit hard by a player from the opposing team.

“I remember the intense pain,” said Zach. “I thought to myself, I don’t want to play football if it’s going to hurt this bad every time I get hit.”

“It was horrifying to see,” said Mike Holmes, Zach’s dad. “A big guy hit Zach and landed on his right leg. I knew he had to be hurt.”

Emergency surgery

An ambulance initially took Zach to the local hospital in Manchester. The Holmes’ called Zach’s pediatrician, Dr. Richard Mersch, from St. Luke’s Physicians and Clinics Hiawatha Pediatrics.

“The nurses and staff at St. Luke’s Center for Women’s and Children’s Health were so nice and accommodating, it had all of the comforts of home for Zach.”

Mike Holmes, Zach’s father

Zach Holmes, with his father Mike, is back at school and cheering on his teammates this basketball season.

“Dr. Mersch was great. He was able to call over to St. Luke’s Emergency Department and alert them that Zach would be arriving soon,” said Mike. “Once we arrived at St. Luke’s ER, the doctors and nurses were great.”

“Zach’s clinical exam and the pain he was experiencing was consistent with a femur fracture,” said Donald Linder, DO, St. Luke’s ER doctor. “We ordered X-rays to evaluate the exact location of the break so the surgeon would know how to prepare for surgery.”

Dr. Lisa Coester, an orthopaedic surgeon from Physicians’ Clinic of Iowa, P.C., placed a pin in Zach’s femur. He was put in traction, then a body cast to keep him from moving so his leg would heal.

“Dr. Coester was great,” said Mike. “She told me she would repair Zach’s leg like she’d fix her own children.”

“Kids are usually treated with traction and casts,” said Dr. Coester. “Zach is at a borderline age – in between trying just pins, a cast and traction or using rods. It’s just not an easy problem to deal with at his age.”

Comforts of home

For three weeks Zach was a patient at St. Luke’s Center for Women’s and Children’s Health.

“The nurses were great,” said Zach. “I had a button I could push and the nurses would get me what I wanted – like ice cream and they even took me outside to enjoy the nice weather. My room was nice, I had Playstation 2 and I had a chat room going on Nintendo DS.”

“The nurses and staff at St. Luke’s Center for Women’s and Children’s Health were so nice and accommodating,” said Mike.



Lisa Coester, MD
orthopaedic surgeon
Physicians’ Clinic of Iowa, P.C.

“It had all of the comforts of home for Zach. One day Zach had 27 visitors during his stay. People were waiting in the hallway to see Zach and the nurses didn’t say anything.”

“Zach underwent a second surgery to remove the pin from his leg,” said Dr. Coester. “But when the pin and the cast were removed the fracture moved to an unacceptable position so I had to perform another surgery and insert rods.”

In all, Zach has had three surgeries in only two months. He won’t be playing football anytime soon and that’s OK with him.

“The pins in my leg will have to stay in for about eight to 10 months and after they are removed I’ll have a period of recovery so football is not an option,” said Zach. “If I can’t play for a couple of years, I don’t think I’ll ever want to play. I think I’ll stick to basketball. I also will likely go out for cross country and track.”

“Zach has had such great care,” said Mike. “We are told when all is said and



After the accident, Dr. Donald Linder was able to view Zach Holmes’ X-ray on a screen in a critical care room in the ER.

done that Zach’s leg will be even stronger than it was before the accident.”

“The rods I used with Zach are different than what I would use with an adult,” said Dr. Coester. “They are not as sturdy – but that is because I don’t want to violate any of Zach’s growth plates. Zach should continue to grow normally and he should be just fine when he’s completely healed.”

Until that day, Zach continues to use crutches to get around and returned to school. Even though he can’t play basketball this season, he watches the games from the bench and cheers on his teammates.

“I played football so I know injuries happen,” said Mike. “But when you are coaching and you actually see your son laying there in pain. I can’t fully describe that feeling, but I do know I don’t want to see it again. However, I am glad we were able to get the care we did for Zach and he’s on his way to being 100 percent again.”

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