

St. Joseph Medical Center

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Loyola Coach Recovers from Spinal Cord Compression Caused by Wrestling Injury, Thanks to Spinal Cord Decompression

WHAT: An assistant Wrestling Coach at Loyola High School suffered a 15 minute episode of quadraparesis and spinal cord injury Monday, November 22, during which he lost the use of all four extremities. His injury resulted from a demonstration with a 220-pound student doing shooting takedowns. His head hit the wrestling mat while “sprawling,” which resulted in the injury.

The formal diagnosis of the 35-year-old Mike Zito was herniated disks at C5-6 and C6-7, superimposed on congenital cervical spinal stenosis. He was immediately taken to St. Joseph Medical Center, where he received emergency care, which included high dose steroids. He later underwent anterior cervical decompression of the spinal cord and application of a plate in the front of his neck.

WHO: Dr. Paul McAfee, chief of Spinal Surgery, St. Joseph Medical Center

“It’s amazing what a difference just a few more minutes of spinal cord compression makes in terms of a higher risk that the patient will not recover,” says Dr. McAfee. He adds that it was very fortunate that the patient did not slip back into quadraparesis, which could have led to a permanent paralysis. The high dose steroids given at St. Joseph’s emergency department eased the compression on the spine and helped prevent this from occurring. Mike Zito is expected to make a full recovery and has regained nerve root function, adds Dr. McAfee.

The anterior cervical decompression performed by Dr. McAfee involved removing the damaged discs, followed by a spinal fusion to support the normal loads of the cervical spine where the discs were removed. Next, the fusion was fixed with a titanium plate and screw device to provide further stability.

St. Joseph Medical Center is a 365-bed nonprofit, regional medical center in Towson, Md., and a member of Catholic Health Initiatives. Founded in 1864 by the Sisters of St. Francis, St. Joseph has been recognized by “U.S. News & World Report” as one of America’s best orthopaedic facilities and is a nationally ranked Top 100 heart hospital. For more information about St. Joseph Medical Center, visit sjmcmd.org.