Young player tackles rare spinal cord disorder

Seth Lange lives and breathes football. As a high school defensive/offensive tackle, the 17-year-old was used to hard work and meeting opponents head-on. The 2008 First Team All-Conference player from Fullerton, Neb., was blindsided when he woke up one morning last fall and couldn't walk.

Seth had spent the night at a friend's house on Oct. 19, 2008, and felt sluggish when he returned home Sunday, sleeping most of the day. By Monday, he was nauseated and couldn't stand. Local doctors suspected Seth caught a flu virus. His parents, Mike and Theresa, were instructed to push the electrolytes by providing Gatorade. Seth continued to deteriorate and on Tueday, his concerned parents transported their son to Boone County Hospital in Albion. Doctors there concluded he was suffering from Guillain-Barre syndrome and transferred him to Children's Hospital in Omaha.

Seth Lange masters the art of the Rev1X® hockey sled during therapy as Kristin Luethke, CTR (left), Dawny Foutin, RA and Colleen Spellman, OTR look on.

After two weeks of testing, doctors determined Seth had contracted transverse myelitis, a condition resulting from inflammation of the spinal cord. Researchers are uncertain of the exact causes of the disorder, but believe that it often occurs when the body's immune system mistakenly attacks its own tissues, resulting in inflammation and injury to the insulating material that covers nerve cell fibers within the spinal cord.[1] Most patients will only encounter one episode of the disorder in their lifetime. It is estimated that about 1,400 new cases of transverse myelitis are diagnosed each year in the United States, and approximately 33,000 Americans have some type of disability resulting from the disorder.[2]

"It was kind of a shock how it all happened to me," said Seth. The 245-pound linebacker was devastated that he'd lost 25 pounds and was paralyzed. On Nov. 3, Seth arrived via ambulance to Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital, extremely weak and taking 10 different medications. Kristi Britten, physical therapist, did an initial evaluation on Seth and was concerned because he complained of pain in his calves. Tests would reveal blood clots in both legs. Therapy was delayed temporarily as Seth was put on Coumadin, a blood thinner to reduce the formation of blood clots.

Nursing staff helped to wean Seth off some of his medications and his therapy team devised a plan to meet his number one goal: to walk again. "I just wanted to get back to my normal life," said Seth.

The therapists rotated his regime to keep it interesting for the young teen. Seth's therapy sessions included using the Bowflex®, a Rev1X® hockey sled and walking with weights in the aqua therapy pool. Seth appreciated the variety of therapies and was determined to master each one. "In his first two weeks, he made a lot of progress," noted Theresa.

Seth was sidelined during Fullerton's football season. "I miss walking and playing football the most," said Seth. Full days of therapy challenged #79 of the Fullerton Warriors. "At times, my therapy sessions have been harder than football practice!" Seth shared. "I think it helps when your personality meshes with the therapist's," Seth added. He noticed his quads and hips getting stronger and his hamstrings were still tight, but improving.

Seth's determination and the caring support of family, friends and the Madonna staff kept his spirits bright. "Seth was a great patient to work with, he always came to therapy with a positive attitude and accepted any challenged with a smile," said Kristi. Colleen Spellman, occupational therapist, agreed that Seth worked hard, always with a smile. "Seth was especially motivated to learn new techniques, like cooking his own steak on a George Foreman Grill® or using the Wii Fit® to improve his core strength and balance," said Colleen.

> "I just wanted to get back to my normal life."
> —Seth Lange

Seth never fell behind with his school work thanks to help from Madonna's Therapeutic Learning Center (TLC). "It's awesome to have a place that keeps him on track with his studies," said Theresa.

At the end of January, Seth transitioned to Madonna's outpatient program and will discharge in approximately two weeks. The high school junior has perfected walking with his walker and is feeling stronger every day. Seth is anxious to reconnect with friends at Fullerton High School, especially the Warriors who have rallied around their teammate.

[1] *Source: www.mayoclinic.com*
[2] *Source: www.ninds.nih.gov*

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