NEWS RELEASE

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Athlete expresses gratitude for his traumatic brain injury recovery at Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital

Lincoln, Neb. - Garret Durst tips his trademark Ed Hardy hat and flashes a smile as one of his Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital physical therapists recognizes him in the hospital waiting area. "I'm just feeling great now," states the 21-year-old enthusiastically. It's been three months since the former collegiate-level gymnast was injured in a car accident that robbed his memory and left him with a traumatic brain injury (TBI).

On August 10, Durst was a back seat passenger in an SUV when the driver lost control on a county road near Malcolm, Neb., and the car rolled. Durst lay in a coma for a week at BryanLGH West before admitting to Madonna's Long Term Acute Care Hospital (LTACH). "I remember waking up, and I couldn't believe the summer was over," recalled Durst. "It shocked me that I'd lost all that time," he added.

Durst was accompanied by his former coach and mentor, Francis Allen, on a therapy outing to watch the men's UNL gymnastic team practice at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

As a student athlete and gymnast, Durst had adopted a rigorous schedule that formed his mental and physical prowess. He was on athletic scholarship at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln competing in the still rings and vault. Durst's intense conditioning would figure significantly in his remarkable recovery at Madonna.

On LTACH, Durst arrived in a confused and agitated state from a traumatic brain injury (TBI) and slept in a net bed to keep from falling out. Bolstered by family support, daily visits from his former coach, Francis Allen, and his own determination, Durst's strength and spirit soared.

Within three weeks, he moved to the Acute unit and began extensive physical, occupational and speech therapy. Durst's therapy team helped build his confidence with sessions focused on walking, balancing and improving his cognitive skills.

A highlight for Durst was a therapy outing to visit his former gymnastic teammates during one of their practices at the Bob Devaney Sports Center. "I was anxious and excited about going down to the gym again," said Durst. Scott Fandrich, physical therapist, accompanied him and said the outing was the first time Durst ventured outside since the accident. "He has made great progress since that point," said Fandrich.

By Sept. 25, Durst had rejoined his family at home. He continues to make gains participating in Madonna's Rehabilitation Day Program. A broadcast communications major, Durst looks forward to resuming classes at UNL next semester and easing into campus life again. There will be a gaping hole in the senior's schedule without gymnastics.

After suffering the TBI, Durst realizes athletic competition is out of the question. "I know I'm done with gymnastics; that's hard," shared Durst. But, he isn't one to dwell on the past. "I honestly never thought this would happen to me, but I'm just moving forward," he said.

The recent brush with death has made Durst view each day as a gift. This year will be a poignant Thanksgiving for Durst and his family. "I'm just so thankful to be alive," he said.

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Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital provides hope and healing to thousands of people whose lives had been interrupted by traumatic events or illness. Madonna's approach to rehabilitation is much more than just therapy, it's rebuilding lives and families; and putting hopes and dreams back together. Through CARF accredited rehabilitation programs and services, Madonna offers individualized treatment to help every patient heal in mind, body and spirit – and ultimately live life to the fullest. Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital is located at 5401 South Street in Lincoln, Nebraska, 68506; 402-489-7102; www.Madonna.org.