

October 5, 2015

## **MOUNT MERCY'S EMILY GAWLAK: BACK IN ACTION**

Saturday January 17, 2015 is not a day that Mount Mercy Academy senior Emily Gawlak will soon forget. The Magic were playing basketball away against Immaculata, a game that they would eventually win. Gawlak, a junior guard at the time, had really gotten into a groove and was coming off her best performance of the year. She was running down the court to play defense, went up to block the shot, which she did. However, when she came down, disaster struck. Gawlak's left foot somehow ended up bent up against the gymnasium wall.

"Right away I knew it was something very serious. I felt something snap in my arch," Gawlak commented. "One of their parents who is a doctor and our coach John Glose were trying to reassure me and keep me calm, but I knew it was most likely a serious injury. Unfortunately, I have been injured before."

Gawlak's assessment proved to be correct as she was eventually diagnosed with a Lisfranc fracture; an injury of the foot in which one or more of the metatarsal bones are displaced from the ankle. After an initial trip to the Mercy Ambulatory Care Center, Gawlak went to a specialist for additional x-rays the following Monday and within two weeks received her diagnosis. Initially the doctor was unable to determine whether or not she would need surgery. It would depend on whether her injury spread or not.

Eventually it was decided that Gawlak would need surgery to insert a plate and screws into her left foot. She underwent surgery on February 13<sup>th</sup>. Prior to operating the doctor felt that she had a partial tear, but during surgery it was discovered that she had a total displacement. Her doctor told her that her injury could have a recovery period of a full year, but some athletes are cleared to return to competition in nine months.

After her surgery, Gawlak was confined to two weeks of bed rest with her foot elevated. She was then confined to a wheel chair for a month and then progressed to a scooter for another three weeks before finally graduating to a walking boot for the next six weeks.

Gawlak had been extremely active in athletics during her time at Mount Mercy. She played three years of basketball and soccer and ran track for a year. She was injured during the spring of her freshman year.

It was extremely difficult for the athletically involved and competitive Gawlak to remain on the sidelines. Basketball was her favorite sport and it hurt her not to be able to compete. Although the physical pain of her injury and surgery was bearable, the emotional pain of not being able to play on the court with the seniors she had played with for three years was unbearable. Although she was upset that she could not play, Gawlak easily adapted to the role of team supporter, enthusiastically encouraging and cheering for her team and teammates. She was the team's biggest fan during its run to the Monsignor Martin League Class A Championship.

Although she was not actively participating, Gawlak's coaches and teammates always made sure that she felt included. During the spring, lacrosse coach Melissa Graham encouraged Gawlak to come to practices and had her keep the scorebook for the team. Being part of the team helped to keep Gawlak's spirits up. She also noted that many Mount Mercy students and faculty were supportive of and interested in her recovery process.

Once she had recovered enough to wear the boot, Gawlak started her rehabilitation. She went twice a week for rehab until the end of June; working on strengthening exercises and moving on the treadmill. On the days she did not have rehab, she did exercises at home. Although it had only been five and a half months, Gawlak beat the odds and was cleared by her surgeon to resume full athletic activity.

Gawlak returned to basketball action in a summer league. At first she found herself playing with more restraint than she normally did. She found it mentally difficult to compete without being concerned about reinjuring her foot. Gawlak was able to overcome this barrier after the first time she rolled her ankle.

“During one of our summer games I rolled my ankle and one of our opponents stomped on my foot. I was in physical pain but the more crucial pain was the worry I felt about reinjuring myself. Once I saw that I was going to be okay, I found that the mental part was no longer an issue for me on the court,” Gawlak stated.

Currently she is the starting goalie on the Mount Mercy Magic soccer team and Gawlak intends to play both basketball and lacrosse during her final two high school sport seasons. Watching her boot goal kicks, dive and jump for balls, it is difficult to fathom that she suffered a serious injury just eight months prior.

Some questioned whether or not she should even play soccer. It is no secret that Gawlak aspires to play basketball in college. She hopes to study physical therapy in college, an interest that developed as a result of her injuries. Should she risk injury in soccer and not be able to play her senior season of basketball?

“My own family was not convinced that I should play soccer.” Gawlak remarked. “There was a great fear of another injury. I did have some concern when I was playing the forward position in the first two games, but now that I am in goal, I have no concerns at all.”

Mount Mercy soccer coach Brittany Hillery Myers believes that Gawlak is playing at a high level. “She has an exceptional save percentage. She is not afraid to challenge shooters and she shows no restraint when she tries to cover the goal. She certainly seems to have returned to her previous athletic level of performance with no problems at all.”

Doctors have reported that some athletes with Gawlak’s injuries never return to their pre-injury playing levels. Anyone who has attended a Mount Mercy Magic soccer game this season is able to see that Emily Gawlak has beaten the odds and continues to play at the same high level that she played at before her injury. Emily Gawlak was knocked down, but through her determination and efforts, she has risen back to the top.

Emily Gawlak is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Jeffrey Gawlak of Buffalo.



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## Mount Mercy Academy

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