**An ACL revolution?**
**Hickory's Laura Herman would like to think so after being able to return from an acute tear only 12 weeks after surgery**
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**Published May 7, 2002**

Imagine the pain of suffering a torn anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) of the knee. Then imagine wearing a post-operative brace for six weeks, trudging through 20-24 weeks of rigorous and often painful rehabilitation, and not being able to return to athletic competition for anywhere from 6-12 months. Now imagine for a second the possibilities provided by a procedure that could cut the recovery time to a comparatively miniscule 6-12 weeks. Such a procedure has been available for more than a decade in other parts of the world, but not in the United States where the company that produces the Ligament Advanced Reinforcement System (LARS) has yet to seek or gain the approval of the Food and Drug Administration.

The LARS artificial ligament is made of industrial strength polyester fibers (polyethylene terephtalate) and was used last December in arthroscopic surgery and reconstruction to repair an acute rupture of the ACL suffered by Hickory High School junior Laura Herman. Herman, a daughter of Rick and Anne Herman, Hermitage, tore the ACL in her left knee during a late-November basketball practice with the Hickory Hornettes. She underwent surgery in Montreal, Canada, a month later, and was back on the basketball court 12 weeks after that, in time to see action with the Hornettes in the Budy Guerino Underclassmen Tournament in Sharpsville.

Under normal ACL surgeries currently being utilized in the United States, such a quick return probably wouldn't have been possible. As for Laura and her family made the obviously difficult decision to look beyond the American medical profession to a procedure that could prove extremely beneficial to many athletes someday? Well, this is her story. (...)

The family began researching information on ACL tears when Anne, a teacher at Lakeview School District in Cortland, Ohio, was informed by a fellow teacher about an article that had appeared in the Akron Beacon-Journal on Dec. 6. The article referred to a Ken State University women's basketball player, junior Morgan O'Hara who had torn her ACL two weeks earlier and was expected to return to action in as little as six weeks thanks to a revolutionary surgery. (...)

It was O'Hara father who then passed along the necessary information and contacts in order for the Hermans' to gain more knowledge regarding the use of the synthetic polyester fiber ligament. Upon talking to Dr. Pierre Ranger, the Montreal physician who performs surgery, and John Korah, president of the company that distributes the ligaments, J.K. Orthomedic Ltd, the Hermans were given the names of other athletes who have had the surgery. "Everybody I talked to had nothing negative to say," Rick said. "All were very satisfied and a couple had been through multiple ACL surgeries. They commented that if they had been aware of this surgery the first time around, they never would have had the traditional surgery done." (...)

Dec. 20, the Hermans went to Sacré-Coeur of Montreal with Dr. Pierre Ranger. In traditional surgery, the ACL is removed and replaced with a graft. In this case, the physician sutured the ruptured ACL back together, put the LARS ligament in, anchoring it on either end with a screw and metal staple, and then spiral wrapped the ACL around it. (...)

With traditional surgery, most patients don't begin therapy until the third week. Laura had already had two sessions in Montreal. (...)

In late January, only a little more than one month after surgery, Laura began shooting around in practice with the Hornettes. (...)

There are obvious concerns regarding any medical procedure that isn't approved by the FDA. This revolutionary technique, while seeming beneficial, is no different. (...)

"over the past 25 years in orthopedics, I've learned just because something isn't first invented in this country doesn't mean it isn't valid," said Swanson, one of the county's premier orthopedic surgeons. "You don't throw it out because it wasn't invented here, but you have to look at it with a great deal of caution." (...)