

## **Long trip, short return: Rippon had surgery overseas to save his senior season.**

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Newport Harbor's Ryan Rippon had synthetic ligaments placed in his right knee during surgery performed in Europe. It shortened his recovery and allowed him to play sooner. Ryan Rippon wasn't supposed to be playing high school football at Newport Harbor this season. Not after tearing the anterior cruciate ligament in July in his right knee for the second time in less than a year. U.S. doctors told him and his mother, Joan, that it would take 8-9 months to recover from the ACL surgery he needed, and, even then, he might never get back the same mobility.

Rippon, called by Sailors coach Jeff Brinkley the "best athlete on the team," already had missed most of his junior season because of injuries, and doctors told the running back/defensive back he wasn't going to be able to play his senior season. "No way I was going to let my senior year get away," Rippon said. Rippon found out about a new surgery pro BMX rider Matt Hoffman and pro skateboarder Danny Way – they also tore ACL's – had performed in Austria that had them back in competitions in record time.

Rippon had the surgery there July 22. Three days later he started rehabilitation. He was in the line-up for Newport Harbor on Oct. 7, rushing for 103 yards and a touchdown in the Sailor's 41-14 triumph over Woodbridge in the Sea View League opener last week. He will be with the Sailors tonight when they face Foothill at Newport Harbor. "I will tear my ACL again for my team if that's what I have to do," Rippon said. Rippon was a starter as a sophomore. He was expected to be one of the Sailors' key players last season before he tore the ACL during a practice in Week 1. He missed most of the season but came back late in the year. So Rippon went all out in the off-season, training and lifting to get in the peak condition for his senior year. He was gung-ho about the prospect of playing both ways and was starting to get looks from college coaches.

"The physical therapy was pretty much done by the time the (2004) season ended," Rippon said. "We have really good lifting program for football at Newport." Rippon was primed to show off his skills when the summer passing leagues rolled around. The Sailors were playing in a four-team passing tournament at Santa Margarita in July when Rippon's high school football career almost came to an end on a 95-degree day in a game against Long Beach Poly. Rippon caught a short pass in the flat with three minutes to go and turned upfield, but his right knee didn't go with him. "You could hear my knee pop," he said. "That was it." It was the same knee he injured during his junior season. It was a complete anterior cruciate rupture and a minor cartilage tear. The doctors in America told Rippon he could brace the knee and he could play with no lateral movement or he could get the surgery done as soon as possible and miss his senior season.

So he investigated on the Internet. During Rippon's research he talked with Dr. Tim Brown, the son of Newport Harbor running backs coach Bill Brown. Rippon said Brown has done a lot of cutting edge work with X-Games athletes and surfers. Brown told Rippon of the new surgery in Europe. He put Rippon in contact with John Korah of LARS artificial ligament. If the surgery with the synthetic ligament worked, Rippon said his knee would be as durable after two weeks as it would be after a year if he had ACL surgery in the U.S. "At this point I was just doing it on my own," Rippon said. "I knew my mom wasn't going to be, 'Let's go to Austria.' I knew I had to find out all the details."

Rippon told his mom of the surgery in Austria that could get him back on the playing field this fall. The cost of the surgery was \$10,000 plus travel. His teammates said they would have car washes and fundraisers to help raise money. Joan Rippon needed time to think about it and do her own research, but two days later she told her son, "Pack your bags. We're going to Austria." "The worst-case scenario is it doesn't work and he has to get surgery done in America," Joan said. "Or six weeks and he gets his dream back. He's the greatest kid. He deserved a chance for his dream."

The surgery was performed by Dr. Georg Barisani and took 33 minutes. The torn ACL fibers end up adhering to the synthetic ligaments, which are made of industrial strength woven polyester fiber. "It ends up being three times stronger than a normal ACL," Joan said. "I was a little scared how it would hold up," Rippon said. "Once I took that first hit I was back."