

## **Determination Helps Rippon Overcome Serious Knee Injury**

**By Martin HENDERSON**

**© Times Staff Writer**

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Ryan Rippon didn't have the individual performance he hoped for in Newport Harbor's 28-21 victory over Placentia Valencia in the Southern Section Division VI title game, but the mere fact that Rippon was playing was reward enough.

Rippon went to great lengths to play. In fact, he went more than 6,100 miles — and back. Rippon, who tore the medial collateral ligament in his right knee last season, suffered a torn anterior cruciate ligament in the same knee July 15 in a passing league game against Long Beach Poly. Three doctors told him his season was over and that the injury was so severe that after 12 to 18 months of rehabilitation, he would never play football again.

Rippon was devastated. "I cried more emotionally than pain-wise," he said. "I was trying to understand all the preparation I had done my whole high school career for my senior season, and it was gone like that." But Rippon was told by Tim Brown, son of assistant coach Bill Brown, about a revolutionary surgery performed on skateboarder Danny Way that took place in Austria. It involved implanting an industrial strength polyester fiber in the knee in a procedure called LARS.

With his senior season on the line, Rippon made an international phone call, researched the subject on the Internet, and told his mother when she got home that night, July 20, that they were going to Vienna. Joan Rippon agreed. They left July 22, Ryan had surgery July 25, and was riding a stationary bike and jogging a few feet by July 27. They returned July 30. The cost of the surgery was about \$10,000. Joan Rippon said that's about \$50,000 to \$70,000 less than ACL surgery in the U.S., in which her deductible and co-pay was \$9,500. "What did I have to lose?" she said.

The arthroscopic surgery by Dr. Georg Barisani took only 33 minutes. Less than 11 weeks after the surgery, on Oct. 7, Rippon rushed 19 times for 102 yards against Manhattan Beach Mira Costa in his season debut, and the next week he achieved his goal of playing in the Sea View League opener against Irvine Woodbridge.

In 10 games, he scored a team-high 13 touchdowns and rushed 234 times for 1,701 yards. He had five consecutive games of more than 170 yards rushing to help the Sailors reach the championship. Included was a 306-yard performance, four yards shy of the school record, in a 28-0 semifinal victory over Tustin. He rushed 25 times for 85 yards against Valencia in the title game, which turned when Coach Jeff Brinkley opened up the offense and quarterback Tom Jackson passed for two second-half touchdowns and ran for another.

"There were some questions about us at the beginning of the year," Rippon said of the team, which finished 11-3. "I think we were slow to answer, but when it mattered, we stepped up and proved ourselves," said his mom. "It's such a blessing: Ryan had his senior year, they won the championship; there couldn't be a greater gift."