

Rutgers' Eric LeGrand is paralyzed from neck down

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Rutgers defensive tackle Eric LeGrand was paralyzed below the neck after making a tackle during a game against Army, and he will remain hospitalized for the near future.

Coach Greg Schiano said Sunday that LeGrand was resting in the intensive care unit at Hackensack University Medical Center. He had emergency surgery overnight to stabilize the spine after making the tackle during Saturday's game at the New Meadowlands Stadium.

"Eric's spirits were as good as you can expect," said Schiano, who visited with him before and after surgery. "He was cognizant of me being there, his mom, everybody.

"He's a fighter."

Schiano, who had tears in his eyes during his press conference following Rutgers' 23-20 overtime win, talked to his team about LeGrand around noon on Sunday.

"As I talked to our team, we're just going to believe that Eric LeGrand is going to walk onto that field again with us," Schiano said. "That's what we believe. We'll see with the speed of which that happens."

LeGrand was hurt with 5:10 to play in the fourth quarter against Army, making a violent tackle on Malcolm Brown on the kickoff return after Rutgers tied the game at 17.

The Avenel resident who played at Colonia High School — just 15 minutes from Rutgers Stadium in Piscataway — appeared to duck his head while making the hit.

The junior lay on the turf for at least 5 minutes while medical and emergency personnel treated him and players on both teams took a knee and watched. Army coach Rich Ellerson walked on the field at one point and put his hand on Schiano's shoulder to comfort him.

"They were very, very efficient," Schiano said of the medical staff that treated the 6-foot-3, 230-pound LeGrand on the field. "It was a scary situation, but it was one that I was very impressed by our medical team and by everybody involved."

The injury brought back memories of the injury to Buffalo Bills tight end Kevin Everett in 2007. He ducked his head tackling Denver's Domenik Hixon during the second-half kickoff in the season opener. He was paralyzed from the neck down and doctors feared he'd never walk again.

Everett showed signs of movement days later and began walking by November.

Detroit Lions guard Mike Utley was not so fortunate. He was paralyzed below the chest after sustaining a neck injury in a 1991 game.

An advertisement for PRWeb. It features a man in a maroon shirt with his arms crossed, smiling. To his right is the PRWeb logo, which includes a stylized 'P' and 'R' and the text 'PRWeb Online Visibility from Vocus'. Below the logo is a list of three bullet points: 'Build Online Visibility', 'Attract New Customers', and 'Boost Your Business!'. At the bottom right is a blue button with the text 'Get Started Now'.

Schiano said he already talked to Penn State coach Joe Paterno about how to handle such a delicate situation. Paterno coached Adam Taliaferro, who had a career-ending spinal cord injury in 2002. Doctors initially feared he would never walk again after he was motionless on the field for several minutes. He had a lengthy recovery and eventually walked again.

Schiano kept private his details of his conversation with Paterno.

"I just wanted to make sure there was nothing I was overlooking," Schiano said.

LeGrand was a member of the football team's leadership council for two years. Schiano said LeGrand was known for his work ethic and the way he cares for other players. Several players visited the hospital and spent time with his mother.

"He's got a new set of challenges in front of him," Schiano said. "There's not a doubt in my mind that Eric LeGrand is going to look these challenges right in the eye, like he has all the rest of them, and he's going to overcome them."

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