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Neck injury ends WSU safety LeAndre Daniels' career

Tests on the sophomore safety revealed a fracture in the C1 vertebra, the first cervical vertebra where the spine joins the skull.

By **Vince Grippi**

The Spokesman-Review

PULLMAN — Washington State sophomore LeAndre Daniels' football career is over, the school announced Friday.

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The safety from San Leandro, Calif., suffered a neck injury at practice last week, which at first was thought to be minor. Imaging tests taken at the time failed to reveal the extent of the damage.

Daniels seemed to be improving and was allowed to run during practice last Friday. But he awoke Saturday with pain in his neck, and more tests were ordered. They revealed a fracture in the C1 vertebra, the first cervical vertebra where the spine joins the skull.

"That's why followup tests are done," said Bill Drake, WSU trainer. "Sometimes, when things aren't getting better, and signs indicate, you do a multitude of tests to keep chasing it down."

A spinal injury that high has too many risks, Drake said, and that's why, after multiple consultations with neurosurgical spine specialists, the decision was made to end Daniels' career.

"That area has lots to do with very important life-sustaining functions," Drake said.

The 20-year-old will wear a halo collar for 8 to 10 weeks and still may need surgery depending on how the injury heals. He was unavailable for comment Friday.

"It's a tough situation, but I think he's handling it pretty well," said Cougars safety Tyree Toomer, Daniels' roommate. "He's down, he's going through a rough time, but I think he's handling it pretty good.

"He has a good attitude about stuff. He's not thinking negative. That's what I like, he's trying to stay positive the best he can."

Daniels was expected to be the Cougars' third safety, playing in their nickel package.

"We had big plans for this year, to just own the secondary," Toomer said. "This experience hits close to home. For this to happen, it's a huge eye-opener."

Daniels redshirted in 2008, then started the first two games in 2009 before suffering a season-ending broken leg against Hawaii.

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