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Injured high school football player begins recovery

BY STAN CALDWELL • SEPTEMBER 12, 2008

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North Forrest High football player Justin McCray remains in a Jackson hospital as he begins the long recovery from injuries he incurred Tuesday in a junior varsity game.

ADVERTISEMENT McCray, a sophomore wide receiver and defensive back, suffered a severe spinal cord injury while making a tackle during the game at Purvis and remains paralyzed in the lower part of his body.

He is in good condition in the intensive-care unit at University Medical Center in Jackson following seven hours of surgery Wednesday night.

"It went real good," North Forrest football coach Shannon White said Thursday. "They went in to realign his spine and clear an air passage in his throat."

White said it's too early to tell what the long-range prognosis is for McCray's recovery.

"(The doctors) aren't saying a lot about that right now," White said. "He'll go through rehab, but we're not sure how long it will be before he's ready for that. Whenever he regains some of his strength is when he'll start rehab."

White said the injury has affected his team's preparation for tonight's game at Purvis.

"It's a real close-knit group," White said. "Tuesday night and much of the day Wednesday there was a lot of emotion, a lot of sadness and sympathy, but today what I see is the acceptance of Justin's condition."

"Now, most of their attention is going to his family."

Fans who attend tonight's game will be asked to help with a portion of McCray's medical expenses, which could be extensive.

"We're going to set up some buckets and people at the gates (at the Purvis High stadium)," said Freddie Triplett, president of the Purvis High Booster Club. My understanding is the Ronald McDonald (House in Jackson for families of children with severe medical problems) is full, so we felt the only way we could help the family was simply by collecting cash contributions."

Triplett said any money collected will go into the account that has been set up on the family's behalf at BancorpSouth.

"Purvis has been in this same situation, with Joseph Parker (a former Tornado player who was paralyzed in a game in 1997)," Triplett said. "Rivalries go out the window when something like that happens."

White said he thinks just going through the routine of game day will help his team get through this week's ordeal.

"We practiced (Wednesday), and while it wasn't our normal Wednesday practice, I felt like it was important for the kids to do something physical," White said. "We don't necessarily want them to forget what happened, but we do want to get their minds off of it for a while."



TO HELP

- A fund has been established at BancorpSouth to help McCray's family with medical expenses. The fund will be collected at any BancorpSouth branch in the Hattiesburg area. The fund also will be collected prior to tonight's high school game at Purvis between North Forrest and Purvis High.

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