

Lawrence Williams: Murrah High School senior

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Lawrence Williams finishes the question: On the morning of the accident ...

ADVERTISEMENT "Did I have any bad feeling?" he says. "No, sir."

In fact, his ears had been filled with laughter that morning. Before leaving for the intrasquad scrimmage at Murrah High School on Aug. 23, Williams spent time playing with his 12-month-old cousin, Jorden Robinson.

Nobody could get Jorden to walk, but Williams could make him giggle. Over and over.

He promised Jorden more giggles that afternoon.

Williams, a 5-foot-11, 155-pound cornerback was finally going to earn playing time as a senior.

"That kid worked and worked and worked to make himself into a football player," says Murrah coach Zack Grady.

A few minutes into the scrimmage, junior quarterback Jabbari Harris scrambled downfield. Williams came up and tackled him.

Immediately, Williams snatched off his helmet and screamed "I can't feel my legs!"

"I knew it was bad," Grady says. "When a kid like that stays down, you know he's hurt."

A kid like that.

A kid who made 27 on the ACT without the use of a calculator. A kid who missed only two summer weightlifting sessions - one for a funeral, another to attend college day at Mississippi State.

Williams says it felt as if his legs had disappeared.

"I reached down and touched them, but I could only feel my hands," he says.

He was scared, he says.

And angry. "They cut off my Under Armour shirt. I love my Under Armour."

Grady was concerned "because his legs were crossed" at the ankles and not moving.

Harris knelt near Williams, crying, saying he was sorry if it was his fault.



Joe

Murrah players honor teammate L... was left paralyzed after suffering a preseason practice.



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Williams was taken to University of Mississippi Medical Center. His mother, Selena Williams, arrived within minutes.

"He asked me, 'Why me, Mama?' " she recalls. "I told him, 'I don't know. But the Lord is using you.' "

Three days later, Williams underwent surgery. Two metal rods were inserted to help stabilize his back.

Lawrence says doctors have told him he suffered an injury to his C4 vertebrae and a bruised spinal cord.

Bruised, not severed. Which gives Williams hope that he will walk again.

"I know God has a plan for me," Williams says.

Sitting in a wheelchair in his room at Blair E. Batson Hospital for Children in Jackson, one would never know Williams was injured. He is bright-eyed. Positive. Has a strong handshake. And feels feisty enough to banter back and forth with his relatives.

"When I walk, you give me that Mustang of yours. How 'bout that?" Lawrence says to his uncle, Ken Williams.

His brother, 13-year-old Quinton Williams, continues playing football for Blackburn Middle School. He is a fullback and linebacker. Blackburn has won its first two games.

Coaches and teammates bought him a PlayStation 3. They visit often. So does his girlfriend, Robyn Simmons.

Sacks of get-well cards, prayer cards and handwritten notes have been delivered. "From people I don't even know," he says. "It makes me feel blessed."

His teammates honor him as they run onto the field before every game, led by linebacker Marcus Cable and defensive back Jamaal Stevenson who hold up Williams' No. 25 jersey for all to see and remember.

Grady says the injury has made him "feel totally different" about football.

He still loves it. Loves coaching it. "But every play, every time you see them kids get hit ... it's frightening. It makes you think," he says.

Grady has watched the play on tape countless times.

"At first, I was worried Lawrence hit him with the top of his head, which we harp on them not to do," Grady says. "But he didn't. It was a whiplash effect. Lawrence got his body across (Harris) just like we teach. What happened was, (Harris') thigh caught Lawrence in the side of the head. It just doesn't look that vicious."

Grady says the Murrah coaches and players "are praying and rallying around" Williams. But not in a sympathetic way.

"He's not dead. And we don't want to keep going up there and just saying 'How are you doing?' " Grady says. "I want him to know he is still a big part of this team. And I'm going to coach him just like I always have.

"He's in a bigger game now, and I intend to coach him up."

At his daily rehab session, Williams practices getting in and out of his wheelchair and balancing on a blue mat resting on a table. It gets easier, he says, with each try.

Doctors can't give the Williams family a definitive outcome. "But I will walk again, it's just a matter of time," he says. "A guy came in here to see me the other day who had fallen out of a tree stand. Doctors told him he would never walk again. But he stood there and told me, 'You can do it. That's why I walked in here, to prove it to you.' People like that make me know I can do it."

Plus, signs like these: When Williams' mother was notified about her son's injury, she phoned her sister to come over and stay with Jorden.

Later that afternoon, when she called her sister to give her an update, her sister had some news of her own: On the day Lawrence's ability to walk was taken away, little Jorden took his first steps.

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