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from Archives: Local News Updated: Saturday, September 19, 2009

M-F football player suffers broken neck
Nick Watts is expected to recover after being airlifted to a hospital in Portland.

By ALFRED DIAZ of the Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

MILTON-FREEWATER — A McLoughlin High School senior is expected to recover after breaking his neck during a football game and then having to be airlifted to Oregon Health & Science University Hospital in Portland.

Nick Watts, 17, was playing linebacker against the Pilot Rock High Rockets on Friday night. About 10 minutes into the third quarter he tackled a running back and injured his third and fourth neck vertebrae, causing a clean break in one and a fracture in the other, according to school officials.

Watts walked off the field after the impact, but was noticeably affected, said head coach Chuck Pease.

"Nick couldn't remember part of the game and couldn't remember what happened," said Pease, who added that he and his staff had recently completed concussion training and were looking for signs of a major head trauma.

"It was a large hit, and you don't know if it was a concussion or anything," he said.

After being cleared by EMTs, Watts was sidelined for the remainder of the game. But as "his adrenalin wore off" he started to complain more about his neck, Pease said.

"He was actually standing and toward the end he was just hurting a lot," Pease said. Immediately after the game, Watts' parents decided to drive him to St. Anthony Hospital in Pendleton.

Two of the team's assistant coaches stopped by the hospital on the way home to check up on Watts. Shortly after they arrived, Watts was diagnosed with a broken neck.

About 1:45 a.m. Watts and his mother, Mary, were airlifted to Oregon Health & Science University Hospital.

Assistant coaches Paul Ellis and Steve Birdwill volunteered to drive Watts' father, Mike, to Portland and arrived early Saturday morning.

Pease said he also went to the hospital when he heard Watts had a broken neck and stayed with the family until the injured player was airlifted.

"He was in good spirits ... I think he understood the seriousness of this thing. But he was talking about how he would be back to play football," Pease said.

School District Superintendent Marilyn McBride said the family reports that Watts most likely won't need surgery, that he can move both arms and legs and that he will wear a C-collar for about 12 weeks.

On Saturday morning a group of roughly 100 students, faculty, counselors and other community members met at the Mac-Hi gym for an update on Watts and to show support, which included signing get-well cards and making posters with special messages.

"A lot of them did give a bit of narratives. The kids surrounded the table and were writing on these poster boards, and it was a very moving scene," McBride said.

Dylan Cutler, the running back who Watts tackled, was also injured and down for several minutes. He eventually walked off the field and later returned to the game.

"I been involved in football since '54. All those years I have coached and officiated, the impact of the hit was like you have never heard before. And both kids went down and then he (Watts) got up and started walking around," Pease said.

"He is a wrestler. He has been an athlete. He has always worked out and lifted weights. And his training skills have developed his body so that he is a real muscular kid. And I am not a doctor, but I think that had a lot to do with what he was able to do," Pease said.

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Details on Watts' recovery will be available online at the district's Web site at www.milffree.k12.or.us.

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Truthtalker@1313 wrote on Sep 19, 2009 11:45 PM:

" Prayers and best wishes to Nick and his family. We're hopeful for a speedy and full recovery. To Chuck Pease and all the Mac-Hi football coaches and players, you are in our thoughts and prayers also. "

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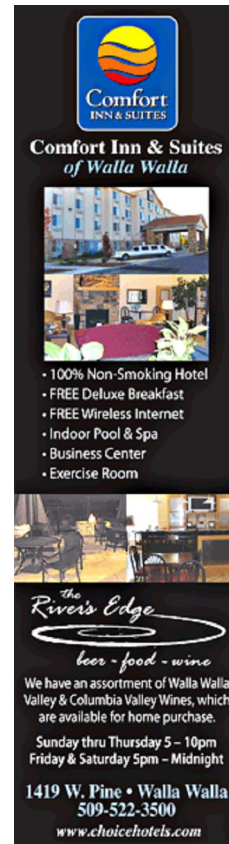
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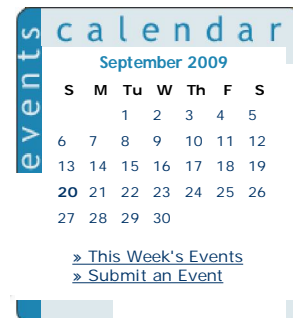
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