

Teamwork and rapid response save a critically injured young athlete

When Seconds Count

By Sally Owen

When Kelsey Kutz glanced at her watch during soccer practice, it was 3:05 p.m. That's the last thing she remembers.

Bad weather had forced practice into the gym for the Perryville, Mo. St. Vincent High School girls' soccer team. It was during practice that Kelsey fell and hit her head on a concrete wall. The decision was quickly made to have Kelsey transported by ambulance to nearby Perry County Memorial Hospital for evaluation.

A CT scan at the hospital revealed a skull fracture and an epidural hematoma from a lacerated artery. Although conscious, Kelsey was unable to tell physicians what had happened. Quickly, another decision was made, and a phone call was placed to Cape Girardeau neurosurgeon Scott R. Gibbs, M.D., for a consultation.

"I could sense the trepidation in the ER physician's voice," says Gibbs. Another decision: Kelsey

"This situation required an A+ team working with me, and that's exactly what I had. The ER physician in Perryville, the paramedics, the ER, Radiology and Surgery staffs at Southeast worked as a team. Just as in a relay race, everybody has to do his or her part to win. Without that kind of teamwork, this kind of heartwarming result would not have been possible."

— Scott R. Gibbs, M.D., Neurosurgery

would be transferred by air ambulance to Southeast Missouri Hospital's Regional Brain and Spine Center. Bad weather immediately scrapped that plan. "That's when the ER physician could hear the trepidation in *my* voice," adds Gibbs. "I knew that her injury could turn bad very quickly."

During the 30-minute ground ambulance trip from Perryville to Southeast, Gibbs wasted no time in assembling and preparing the team that would receive Kelsey. Emergency Services, Radiology and OR staffs responded rapidly and were ready when she arrived. Gibbs says, "We were prepared for emergency brain surgery in the ER, should it have been necessary."

As precious minutes ticked by during the ambulance transport, Kelsey, 18, began to quickly deteriorate. At

Southeast, Gibbs met the ambulance in the parking area to assess Kelsey. "She was unresponsive verbally and could barely open her eyes," he says. The hematoma had enlarged alarmingly in just a half-hour. The situation was critical.

Making Minutes Count

Kelsey arrived at Southeast at 6:49 p.m. Once into ER, the Emergency Services team and Gibbs stabilized Kelsey. She was intubated, and another CT scan was performed. At 7:05 p.m., she was transported to surgery where pre-preparations for her emergency surgery were rapidly coordinated. At 7:38 p.m., the first incision was made. Just 49 minutes had elapsed from ambulance to incision.

Just under two hours later, Kelsey was in recovery. Gibbs had



Scott R. Gibbs, M.D., and Carol Bland, R.N., visit with Kelsey Kutz shortly before her dismissal from the hospital.

successfully removed the hematoma, located the source of active bleeding and stopped it.

Without such a rapid response and teamwork, "Kelsey likely would have died," says Gibbs.

During Kelsey's operation, the surgery waiting room quickly filled with family, friends, coaches, the school principal and her prom date. Once Kelsey was taken from recovery and settled into ICU, "Dr. Gibbs went the extra mile after a very long day and again stopped by the ICU waiting room to update everyone about Kelsey and how she was doing," says her mother, Kathy. "That meant so much to us."

After just a day in ICU, Kelsey was moved to Southeast's Neuro Unit, where she continued her remarkable recovery and was dismissed from the hospital two days

later. Of her hospital stay, Kelsey says, "All the nurses and doctors and therapists were so nice to me." She adds with a mischievous smile, "And I liked my Jell-O."

"It took a while for Kelsey's cognitive skills to come back completely," her mother says, "but day by day, she got better and better."

A Prom and a Wedding

So much better, in fact, that Kelsey attended her senior prom with her date, Clinton Rice, on April 8, just two weeks and five days after her accident. By the time her brother Derek was married on April 22, "I didn't have to do just slow dances. I got to dance any way I wanted," Kelsey says. "Everyone tells me I'm a pretty lucky girl."

Shortly before graduating from high school, Kelsey and her mother



A beaming Kelsey with prom date Clinton Rice.

returned to Southeast to visit with staff who cared for Kelsey. Among them were Rehab staff member Alan Williams, PTA, and Cara Frazier, P.T. "To see someone make so much progress makes it all worthwhile to us," Williams says.

This fall, Kelsey will begin working toward a degree in nursing at Maryville University in St. Louis. Adds Gibbs, "Neurosurgeons have 'high highs' and 'low lows.' Kelsey was one of those 'high highs.' Her future is bright and without limit—the world is waiting." ■

Play Safe!

Playing sports is fun and good exercise. For safety tips about how to keep you in the game, go to www.usa.safekids.org