

High School Soccer Star Gets Back in the Game

It was a day Alex Lucaci would never forget, if only he could remember it. On November 1, 2007, the Summit High School soccer team was beating League-rival Morris Hills in a matchup on Upper Tatlock Field. With just minutes left in the game, a Morris Hills player bounded toward the Summit goal and took a shot. Alex, Summit's junior goalkeeper and co-captain, sprang up in the air to make the save. As Alex's feet left the ground, the Morris Hills player clipped him in the knees, flipping Alex upside down and onto his head. The crowd gasped as both players were knocked unconscious and lay motionless.

Alex was taken by ambulance to the Emergency Department, where an evaluation and CT scan revealed he had a concussion, but no bleeding on the brain. In a follow-up visit with his pediatrician, Alex was referred to Dr. Joseph Rempson, co-director of Atlantic Neuroscience Institute's Concussion Center at Overlook.

"Dr. Rempson could tell that Alex was badly concussed based upon his performance on the center's computerized neuropsychological tests and assessments," said Alex's mother, Barbara. "He helped us understand the cognitive, physical and emotional issues associated with concussions, and told us what we could do to facilitate Alex's recovery in the months ahead.

"He helped us understand the limitations of an injured brain and told us to avoid things that could over stimulate the brain and aggravate Alex's condition – like exposure to light and sound, sitting in front of a computer or even watching television," added Barbara. "I'm a huge fan of the concussion center. We would never have imagined the long road to recovery."

In the weeks following his injury, Alex tried returning to school, but couldn't make it through the day. He attempted to play his French horn, but couldn't quite manage the notes. He lost 10 pounds in two weeks, despite having a healthy appetite. Some of Alex's teachers were growing impatient with his prolonged absences and inability to focus on his studies. Alex, too, was growing frustrated by his slow improvement.

"Dr. Rempson was extremely caring and involved with my recovery," commented Alex. "He called several times a week to see how I was doing; he wrote letters to my teachers; and he even developed a rehab program with a physical therapist to help me get back into shape. He really boosted my spirits by allowing me to work out again and get my life back."

Now, more than a year since his injury and in his senior year, Alex is back in goal and is a top college recruiting prospect. He received all-county and all-conference honors; and the Summit High soccer team had its best season since the early '80s, reaching the county championship finals and state semifinals.

Although Alex still doesn't remember the ill-fated game, he feels like a concussion expert now.

"I tell everyone about the concussion center," he said. "Considering the number of sport teams around here and the risk of head injuries, it's definitely a good thing to have close by."

"We see more and more patients from throughout New Jersey and neighboring states than any other center in the area. What separates Atlantic Neuroscience Institute's Concussion Center from others is our emphasis on education. We advocate a family-centered approach to treatment and a patient-centered approach to life. It's not just about getting players back on the field. It's about investing the time and effort into getting them fully healed and back to their fullest potential."

-- Joseph Rempson, M.D.
Co-Medical Director
The Atlantic Neuroscience Institute's Concussion Center
at Overlook Hospital

The Atlantic Neuroscience Institute's Concussion Center specializes in sports-related and other mild traumatic brain injuries.

Services include:

- Detailed screening and assessment of concussions, including computerized neuropsychological testing.
 - Treatment, evaluation and follow-up, incorporating additional computerized neuropsychological testing as needed; referrals may be made for more extensive neuropsychological testing or neuroradiologic studies.
 - Preseason testing for athletes utilizing computerized neuropsychological testing to provide an individual baseline measurement for use in determining treatment progress if the athlete is subsequently injured later in the season.
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Get the Facts

What is a concussion?

- A concussion, also known as a mild traumatic brain injury (MTBI), is caused by a bump, blow or jolt to either the head or body that causes the brain to move rapidly inside the skull and change how the brain normally functions. (Most concussion patients do not lose consciousness.)
- Concussions may have serious and long-term health effects.
- Signs and symptoms of concussion include headache, nausea, fatigue, confusion or memory problems, sleep disturbances, or mood changes. Symptoms are typically observed immediately after the injury, but some might not be recognized until days or weeks later.

Incidence of Sports-Related Concussions Each Year

- The Center for Disease Control has estimated that approximately 1.6 to 3.8 million sports-related concussions occur each year.

In Which Sports Are Concussions Most Often Reported?

- For high school boys, the leading cause of sports concussions is football; for high school girls, the leading cause of sports concussions is soccer.
- Among children and young adults ranging from 5-18 years of age, the leading sports or recreational activities accounting for concussions are bicycling, football, basketball, playground activities and soccer.

Risks and Recovery

- High school athletes' recovery times for a sports concussion are longer than college athletes' recovery times.
- High school athletes who sustain a concussion are three times more likely to sustain a second concussion.
- Second concussions that occur before full recovery from the first one can have serious consequences.