

MAJOR COMEBACK

By Trinity Cates

"It was an emergency situation, and if it was to go on for any longer," said UWA athletic trainer JoAnna Simon, "he was at risk of losing his legs. That's how serious it was."

"WE ARE SO GRATEFUL AND THANKFUL TO GOD ALMIGHTY. WITHOUT HIM, THIS WOULD NOT BE POSSIBLE."

Acute bilateral compartment syndrome is usually associated with traumatic accidents, such as a car crash. In January, however, running back and graduate student Contravious Blanks found himself in the hospital with this serious condition in his legs after working out.

Bilateral compartment syndrome happens when too much pressure builds up inside the muscles of both legs or arms simultaneously. This pressure cuts off blood flow and squeezes the nerves, causing severe pain, swelling, and numbness. If not treated quickly, it can lead to lasting muscle or nerve damage.

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He stayed in the hospital for a week. "It was very surprising," said Simon. "He said he felt like he had shin splints. I thought that's not uncommon, from ramping back up into activity after being off for the Christmas break," she said.

But something wasn't right. No amount of treatment was helping Blanks. Blanks was rushed to the hospital at 10:00 a.m. "I was kind of shocked. I just thought they'd give me a shot," Blanks said. "As soon as I got there, I went straight into surgery," he said.

After being informed by UWA staff of what had happened, Constance Blanks, Contravious Blanks' mother, rushed to UAB St. Vincent's, where the football player was taken. "When he saw me, he cried. We hugged and embraced. I prayed over him," said Mrs. Blanks. While Blanks was in the hospital recovering, his family, friends, teammates, and coaches supported him during this difficult time. "He was really quiet, wasn't talking about it. I told him, 'I'm your mom. We are not going to sit up in here and set up depression. I know you're hurt because of football, but guess what? Minor setback for a major comeback,'" said Mrs. Blanks.

Blanks showed incredible resilience and drive to get better. Even in those first seven days, he tried to start walking again. "We pray and read daily, all through the day," said Mrs. Blanks. "We tried to encourage him and push him every day," she said. After surgery came the rehabilitation process. Blanks was required to use a walker after being discharged. "I lost a lot of flexibility. I had to relearn how to walk," said Blanks. Blanks and his mother commuted multiple times a week from Butler, AL, for training on campus, while Simon, there every step of the way, commuted from Tuscaloosa, AL.

Mrs. Blanks set and stayed to a routine, arriving in Livingston every morning at 9:00 a.m. for her son's physical therapy. And after the treatment, Blanks still attended his class at 11:00 a.m. "She drove me up here when I couldn't really do it for myself. She would push me every day. She really took care of me while I was down," said Blanks.

The training was not easy. "When the rehab got a little tough, some days I really wanted to quit, but I just had to keep it in my mind why I had to get back," said Blanks.

"The biggest concern was his nerves, because nerves take a long time to heal. He was not supposed to be playing with how severe his injury was," said Simon. Blanks, Simon, and the athletic staff at UWA worked hard to get him back on his feet. In April, it paid off.