

Roethlisberger Injured in Motorcycle Accident

Steelers quarterback undergoes seven hours of surgery for facial fractures suffered in a motorcycle crash. He wasn't wearing a helmet.

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Pittsburgh Steelers star Ben Roethlisberger had been warned repeatedly about his habit of not wearing a helmet while riding his motorcycle. He shrugged off the advice.

Now, he's a cautionary tale.

Roethlisberger, 24, the youngest quarterback to lead his team to a Super Bowl victory, suffered a broken jaw and nose, as well as head lacerations, in a motorcycle crash Monday in which he wasn't wearing a helmet.

Four doctors operated on Roethlisberger for seven hours to treat facial fractures and "all of the fractures were successfully repaired," Dr. Harry W. Sell, chairman of the surgery department at Mercy Hospital, said late Monday night.

Dr. Daniel Pituch, who led the team, said Roethlisberger was in serious but stable condition, and doctors were not aware of any other serious injuries.

"His brain, spine, chest and abdomen appear to be without serious injury, and there are no other confirmed injuries at this time," Pituch said.

The doctors said his condition was not expected to change through the night, and that no updates were expected until today. They declined to release further information at the request of the player's family.

A source familiar with the situation said the most serious injury was to the jaw, but that Roethlisberger had cuts on his cheek and scalp, a chipped tooth or teeth, and scuffs and bruising on his knees. Dr. Larry Jones, chief of trauma at the hospital, said Roethlisberger was coherent and cognizant of what happened in the accident as he was wheeled into surgery.

The typical recovery time for a football player with a broken jaw is about eight weeks. The Steelers are 12 weeks from their season opener.

Steelers President Art Rooney II issued a statement on behalf of the team expressing concern for Roethlisberger, who was injured while riding home minutes after a radio interview.

"I am sure Ben knows that we are praying for his complete recovery," Rooney said. "So far, we have been encouraged by the early reports...."

Fans and some Steelers players, including backup quarterback Charlie Batch, went to the hospital after hearing of the crash.

The quarterback's agent, Leigh Steinberg, described the scene outside the hospital as "a complete zoo" with circling helicopters, crowds around the entrance and camera crews scattered around the parking lot.

The accident occurred at 11:15 a.m. local time near the entrance to the 10th Street Bridge in Pittsburgh. According to witness reports, Roethlisberger, riding his 2005 Suzuki Hayabusa, collided with a 1996 Chrysler New Yorker driven by a 62-year-old woman who was making a left turn onto the bridge. The motorcycle hit the car, and Roethlisberger flew into the windshield and then hit the ground headfirst.

A witness at the scene told reporters that Roethlisberger was dazed but conscious after the accident and bleeding heavily from a head injury.

Sandra Ford, a local artist and writer, said she saw the accident while waiting for a bus. She told the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette that Roethlisberger didn't appear to be speeding but that he didn't seem to see the car.

"He had to be looking somewhere else, he just sailed across the intersection," Ford told the newspaper.

At the time of the accident, she did not know he was the Steelers' quarterback. She found out when she got home and saw the TV news. She said she heard a crunching sound and saw Roethlisberger fly from his motorcycle and into the car.

Afterward, Roethlisberger tumbled off the car and lay still in the street.

"He lay so still, I thought he had died," she told the Post-Gazette.

According to several accounts, Roethlisberger was conscious and talking to medical personnel as he was loaded into an ambulance and taken to the hospital.

At least one medical expert said those details, coupled with reports that Roethlisberger was responding to questions and in upbeat spirits going into surgery, bode well for his recovery. Acknowledging that he was basing his opinion from news reports and not an examination, Dr. Tony Strickland, director of the Sports Concussion Institute of the Centinela-Freeman Medical Center in Marina del Rey, said he would "be surprised if there were any remarkable post-concussion consequences to the accident."

Police said their investigation into the crash could take several weeks.

Selected 11th overall by the Steelers in 2004, Roethlisberger won his first 13 NFL starts and was selected the league's offensive rookie of the year. He punctuated his second season by leading Pittsburgh to a Super Bowl victory over Seattle in February, the Steelers' first since 1980.

Despite warnings from his coaches, former Steelers quarterback Terry Bradshaw and others, Roethlisberger had steadfastly refused to wear a helmet while riding. Pennsylvania law doesn't require motorcyclists to do so.

In May 2005, after Cleveland Browns tight end Kellen Winslow suffered a serious knee injury in a motorcycle accident, Steelers Coach Bill Cowher addressed the helmet issue with Roethlisberger.

"It's one of those things, where he talked about being a risk-taker and I'm not really a risk-taker, I'm pretty

conservative and laid-back," Roethlisberger told the Post-Gazette. "So the big thing is just be careful, and that's what we do. I think every person that rides is careful. That's the biggest thing, I'll just continue to be careful. I told him we never ride alone, we always ride in a group of people, and I think that makes it more safe."

According to Suzuki's website, the type of motorcycle Roethlisberger was riding costs about \$11,000 and is the world's fastest production bike.

In a TV interview last month with the Pittsburgh Channel, Bradshaw looked into the camera and said, "Ben, all of a sudden you're starting to make me feel you're not that smart. Park the motorcycle. You got maybe a 14-year career if you don't get hurt.... Did you not see what the idiot did in Cleveland? And he might lose millions of dollars? Don't be stupid, son. Park the motorcycle. You're cool enough without [it]."

Whereas Winslow was contractually forbidden to ride a motorcycle, there is no such language in Roethlisberger's contract. The standard NFL contract prohibits risky behavior, however.

Steinberg, the agent, said he too had warned him about the risks of riding without a helmet.

"The irony is he was supposed to film a Campbell's Chunky Soup ad [today] with his mother," Steinberg said. "That might be the only thing he'll be able to eat for the time being."

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The Associated Press contributed to this report.