

Lassen hopes to play for Linn-Mar again this season

Written by Jim Ecker

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Matt Lassen knows there are no guarantees, but he's confident he'll be cleared to play basketball for the Linn-Mar Lions again this season.

Lassen suffered a serious head injury last Friday against Iowa City West and spent four days in hospitals, but he's home now in Marion and feeling much better.

"I definitely think I'll be back this year," he said Thursday afternoon in a telephone interview. "It all depends if we get to state and stuff like that.

"I'm pretty confident they'll give me another CAT Scan and I'm confident it will show that everything is better and they'll clear me to play."

Lassen will be evaluated again in mid-January and cannot practice at least until then. "There are still a lot of things up in the air right now," he acknowledged.

Lassen does not remember the accident itself, but he remembers what happened until that point.

"I remember before the game in the locker room and warmups and the first four minutes of the game," he said. "I remember stepping in and getting set to take the charge, and the next thing I remember is waking up in the ambulance."

Lassen twice hit his head on the floor, once when there was contact with the Iowa City West player and again when Linn-Mar teammate Marcus Paige accidentally landed on top of him.

He suffered a concussion, bleeding on the brain and swelling. He also had a seizure a few minutes after the accident while he was being treated on the gym floor at Linn-Mar.

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He was taken to St. Luke's Hospital in Cedar Rapids, then transported to the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics so he could be treated by a neurosurgeon. He spent two days in the intensive care unit in Iowa City and was released Tuesday.

"I feel a lot better," he said Thursday. "It feels good to be home. I haven't had any headaches the last couple of days. Everything is going pretty well right now.

"The first couple of nights they woke me up every hour when they had me in the hospital. So now I'm getting a lot of sleep."

Lassen listened to Linn-Mar's game at Cedar Falls Tuesday night on the radio. The Lions lost, 64-63, in overtime with Lassen resting at home in Marion and pulling for his teammates. He hated to miss the game and not be able to help.

"It was really hard," said Lassen, a 6-foot-4 junior and a member of the starting lineup. "Everyone who knows me knows that all I want to do is play.

"To sit there and listen to my teammates and they were really struggling ... To sit there and listen and not even be there, it was very difficult."

Lassen visited practice for a few minutes Wednesday and planned to stop by again Thursday. He plans to attend Linn-Mar's game at Cedar Rapids Prairie Friday night for part of the time.

"I'll be there at the start of the game," he said. "I don't think Jill (Hendricks), our trainer, wants me to be there for the whole thing, because of loud noises and bright lights she thinks will probably get to me, but I'll definitely be there for the start and probably the first half."

Lassen will not return to school until after the holiday break. Meanwhile, he's resting and

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relaxing at home.

"They don't want me playing video games. They said it would stimulate my brain or stuff like that," he said. "Right now I'm just lying around and resting. I can watch TV. I can eat a lot.

"Right now is a good opportunity for me to gain some weight, because I'm not going to be burning calories very much. Pound the food."

Lassen committed to the University of Albany (N.Y.) last Wednesday, two days before the accident. The Albany coaches followed him on the AAU circuit with the Iowa Barnstormers and Mavericks last spring and summer and invited him to join the program.

"It's humbling," he said. "They offered me a full-ride scholarship last summer. When I got the offer, I was thinking I don't think I'll go out to New York. It was too far away.

"Then we took a visit out there and I just fell in love with it ... the campus, the arena and most of all the coaching staff. They really felt like family out there."

Lassen was being recruited by other schools and described the entire process as stressful. "I knew I was going to go there (to Albany) and I wanted to get it over with so I could focus on playing for the 4A championship," he said.

Lassen hopes to gradually increase the amount of time he spends at practice in the coming weeks, but will not be allowed to have any physical activity. He'll just watch and encourage his teammates.

"It is going to be difficult, because I love the game," he said. "All I want to do is play and be with my teammates. Even not being able to go to school for a little bit is going to be hard for me, because I just want to be back in the normal routine.

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"I'm going to get frustrated, but I'm just trying to think positive, because it could have gone much worse. I could have been paralyzed or something like that, so I try to look at the positive end of things."

Lassen has seen the replay of the injury on KCRG-TV Channel 9. He knows that he fell, tried to get up, then hit his head on the floor again when Paige landed on him. Linn-Mar thought Lassen had drawn a charge on the play, but no foul was called.

"Yeah, I saw it on the news," he said. "My dad thinks I was getting up to yell at the ref."

Lassen said he's determined to play again this season, but knows he'll need permission.

"I'm sure I'll be rusty, because I can't run or jump for five weeks," he said. "I'm used to being at practice every day. It's going to be rough. I'm excited to be out there. Hopefully I'll recover quick."