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Horroric injury, long recovery can't keep E.J. on the sideline



Jeff Wheeler, Star Tribune

Madisen Henry, left, and Caroline Anderson posed with E.J. Henderson for a photo taken by Madisen's mom, Stephanie, after Henderson received his Man of the Year award Tuesday night at Winter Park.

Vikings linebacker E.J. Henderson said a broken femur won't end his football career.

By **CHIP SCOGGINS**, Star Tribune

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The leg injury E.J. Henderson suffered last December was so horrific that his playing career seemed in question.

Less than four months later, the Vikings middle linebacker and team captain was resolute Tuesday night.

"Oh, I'm definitely going to play football again," he said. "I really don't think that's a question at this point barring some freak occurrence. But I'm definitely going to play football again. It's just a matter of, will I be back in July or August?"

Henderson spoke publicly for the first time since he suffered a fractured femur in his left leg against Arizona on Dec. 6. Henderson is a private person by nature, and he politely told a small group of media members several times that he didn't want to elaborate on his injury or recovery.

However, Henderson did shed some light on the process before he received the Vikings Community Man of the Year Award at Winter Park. The ceremony was held in conjunction with a soccer event hosted by the E.J. Henderson Youth Foundation.

"It's been pretty tough," he said. "I really don't want to get into that now, but I think you all know it's been a tough process. But nothing but [downhill] now. I think the worst is behind me."

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Henderson was hurt when he collided with Vikings rookie safety Jamarca Sanford on a tackle attempt in the fourth quarter. The injury was so gruesome that several of his teammates were visibly shaken and had tears in their eyes in the locker room after the game.

Henderson had surgery immediately and began the long rehabilitation process. He spends almost every day at Winter Park and said he's reached a point where he no longer needs a cane to walk. He said his rehab is on schedule and he repeated several times that he expects to be ready by training camp.

"From a break like that you have to start over, so basically that's what we're doing right now," he said. "We're trying to build everything back up and be ready to go. ... I'm definitely progressing. Finally walking. I'm on the up-and-up. Everything is going on schedule. I should be back by August."

It remains to be seen when Henderson will be ready for full contact. But team officials are not surprised by his determination to get back on the field.

"I tell one thing about E.J. Henderson; there is not a guy in the world who wants to play

more and come back from that injury," Vice President of Player Personnel Rick Spielman said last month. "What hopefully will be scheduled is potentially he'll start working out in May to try to see where he's at and then we'll take it from there."

Henderson said he has received a lot of support from the team, his teammates and fans. He said that has allowed him to stay positive throughout his recovery.

"Just looking toward the future," Henderson said. "The positives that are going on. The things that the team did this season. We can build on that."

Henderson traveled to Baltimore last week to take part in a ceremony honoring the 32 players chosen by their teams as the Ed Block Courage Award recipients. The award honors players who "exemplify commitment to the principles of sportsmanship and courage." Henderson's teammates selected him based on the impact he had this season in returning from a foot injury that cut short his 2008 season.

Henderson spent time with the other recipients and came away impressed by the way they have handled their own adversity.

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"You realize that some of the things that you go through are not always that tough so it was a good experience," he said.

Henderson certainly has endured his share of tough times the past few months. He was asked what message he would send to Vikings fans who wonder about his recovery.

"I would say I'm on track," he said. "August is the goal to be there at camp."

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