

Remarkable recovery

I suspect there were lots of knowing smiles across Arkansas last week among readers of Jeremy Muck's compelling feature story in the sports section. It was the account of a remarkable recovery by Pulaski Academy's standout receiver Zack Kelley following surgery for a torn anterior cruciate ligament.

I'm not only talking about Zack's likely record 69-day recovery from a knee surgery that can require up to a year to fully heal, although that feat was truly miraculous and provided the focus for that story.

It was equally pleasing to see Kelley's surgeon, the man who brought him back from despair to playing football again in an astoundingly brief period, was Dr. Bill Hefley, the North Little Rock orthopedic surgeon (and native of little Mount Judea) who used the technique to successfully replace my right hip in 2003. At the time, that muscle-sparing surgery was cutting-edge.

No doubt I wasn't alone. Hefley since has done the same and thereby significantly improved life for thousands of others since, including legendary Razorback coach Frank Broyles and former UA Chancellor David Gearhart.

Even 12 years ago, I realized the caring and creative surgeon was unique in his abilities in the way intuition assures us something good is about to happen. In those days, the minimally invasive hip replacement was relatively new territory for orthopedics and Hefley was among those regularly teaching fellow surgeons how best to perform it.

And so it warmed my heart to see from this story that clearly nothing has changed with his creative medical skills.

Fearing his son's 2015 senior football season was over before it began after suffering the devastating tear during a 7-on-7 championship last summer, Zack's father Kevin, who is Pulaski Academy's coach, searched the Internet to discover the fastest recovery from ACL surgery. He found an Italian soccer player who, in 2002, had revolutionary medical treatments that enabled him to recover from his injury in only 77



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days. So Zack's dad knew that was at least a possibility.

Hefley, a longtime friend of the Kelleys, then pursued the unique possibilities medically, which included using platelet-rich plasma injections and stem cells as well as other surgical methods.

Zack said he placed all his trust and faith in Hefley during the 90-minute surgery (reminded me of my hip), who assured him everything seemed positive.

And so it came to pass last week, the standout receiver was back to catching 12 passes for 177 yards and a touchdown in Pulaski Academy's convincing victory over Little Rock Christian. Then it was on to the state championship game against Little Rock McClellan played last night.

My deadline was too early to tell you how that came out. But my bet is that re-kneaded with his healed ACL thanks to Dr. Bill Hefley and Zack's dedication, Kelley again caught a boatload of passes.

Saving War Eagle

I'm patiently waiting, along with many others in Northwest Arkansas, for Dec. 8. That's when Great River Engineering of Springfield, Mo., is to report its findings on what needs to be done to make the historic but deficient War Eagle bridge fully functional, and the price tag for that restoration.

I'll not be that surprised if that number reaches serious high dollars, considering that \$640,000 was spent in 2010 to make initial repairs to the span. Yet state inspectors in 2013 said it still remained deficient in areas and

in need of additional structural repairs to function safely as a vehicle bridge.

Other than locals, many thousands from across Arkansas and surrounding states have come to admire and appreciate this landmark bridge as they've flocked to the War Eagle Craft Fair.

Right now, the grand single-lane structure built in 1907 to cross War Eagle Creek, like a beloved but aged patient, lingers in a twilight between being here and gone as a functioning bridge. She can survive to transport traffic only through a transfusion of life-renewing public funds, or perhaps a generous benefactor who appreciates her charms and value.

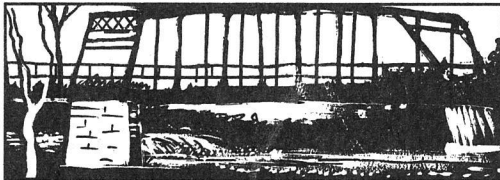
Short of that, there appears to be little hope. The only positive news is that even if a new bridge isn't approved, War Eagle apparently won't be destroyed, rather used only as a pedestrian bridge, and a replacement for vehicles built.

Benton County Justice of the Peace Pat Adams was quoted in a recent story saying he ranks restoring the bridge high on his priorities. "It's not just Benton County," he is quoted saying, "It's a historical marker for the state of Arkansas. You don't see a pamphlet or a poster or a commercial for tourism in the state that doesn't have War Eagle in it. And we all know how important tourism is to our local economy."

The coming report cost the county \$35,000. Any designs to follow are expected to take a year and inflate costs to more than \$110,000. Any restoration likely would take until the summer of 2017.

Justice of the Peace Kurt Moore said he can't support the plan if it's going to cost more to repair than to build a new one. "We're not going to tear the bridge down," he said. "It will be turned into a foot bridge or a limited-use bridge and deeded over to whoever is willing to maintain it."

I'm among those hoping this treasure can be saved and restored fully.



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