

Following successful multi-ligament surgery by Dr. Barry Phillips, Lauren Croom is shooting for a new goal: helping others with injuries.



Reconstruction of both knees helps this college coed bounce back from basketball injury

It's a busy weekday afternoon in the physical therapy department at Campbell Clinic's office in Germantown. In a room buzzing with patients and therapists, Lauren Croom stands out.

She's tall, just a half inch shy of six feet. And she's only 18, with a face so fresh that it is easy to mistake her for one of the teenage patients in the room that day.

A patient is what Lauren was two years ago. Today, she's a physical therapy technician, serious about learning the skills that will enable her to help patients young and old rebuild their bodies and their lives. Lauren understands her patients' pain, frustration, determination, and perseverance. She's been there herself.

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ONE WRONG TURN

In January 2008, while playing in a varsity basketball game as a member of the Bartlett High women’s team, Lauren suffered the injury that ended her career on the hardwood.

“A teammate went for a layup, and the player guarding her went up too,” Lauren said. “I saw I needed to get out of the way and I turned at the knees, without taking a step. The two players hit me on my side. When I went down, I knew immediately something was terribly wrong. I thought I had broken both legs.”

Her team’s sports trainer rushed to help Lauren to her feet. As she tried to stand, one of her knees popped out of place. She couldn’t bear any weight on her legs. Four people carried Lauren from the game.

Doctors at a hospital emergency room suspected torn ligaments and recommended Lauren see an orthopaedic surgeon. The next day, Lauren’s mother called Campbell Clinic for an appointment with Dr. Barry Phillips, a sports medicine specialist. Dr. Phillips did an MRI, which revealed torn ligaments in both knees.

A LONG RECOVERY AHEAD

Two weeks after being injured, Lauren underwent arthroscopic surgery on her left knee, where she had torn the Anterior Cruciate Ligament (ACL) and the Lateral Collateral Ligament (LCL). Surgery was set for several months later on her right knee, where she had a torn PCL (Posterior Cruciate Ligament) and MCL (Medial Collateral Ligament).

ACL surgery is commonly termed a “reconstruction,” rather than repair, because a torn ACL cannot be sewn together again. Reconstruction involves substituting a new ligament for the damaged one.

“We used part of Lauren’s patella tendon as a substitute for the allograft

tissue, due to the fact she had multiple ligaments torn in both knees,” Dr. Phillips said. Three months after the first surgery, Dr. Phillips performed PCL reconstruction on Lauren’s right knee. He warned Lauren that full recovery after surgery could take nine months or more.

Lauren did not return to classes that year, participating instead in her school’s homebound program. Her mother worked from home to help Lauren, who could not get out of bed or walk without help. Lauren began physical therapy at Campbell Clinic within a few weeks of the first surgery, starting with simple exercises to promote muscle strength and improve range of motion.

“It was hard because the left knee was sore from surgery and the other knee was waiting to be repaired,” Lauren said. “But my therapists were really focused on helping me regain my abilities. They were very hands-on and encouraging.” She continued to participate in physical therapy for more than a year.

Nick Bird, senior physical therapist at Campbell Clinic’s Germantown PT facility, said, “Physical therapy is very important for recovery following ACL reconstruction. Lauren had multiple injuries, so her rehabilitation wasn’t easy. But she worked extremely hard.”

THE RIGHT STUFF FOR THE JOB

Today Lauren is a student at The University of Memphis. Her sports activities are limited to watching Tiger basketball and other spectator events. She’s careful when kneeling and takes it easy on some exercise routines while working out. Otherwise, she’s living the life she expected as a college coed.

Lauren’s experience in the physical therapy program at Campbell Clinic strongly influenced her decision to major in exercise and sports science. When she asked her former therapist Nick Bird about work as a PT technician, he didn’t hesitate.

“I was so impressed with Lauren’s work ethic,” Bird said. “I thought it would carry over to her job as a technician, and it has. She’s also personable and compassionate, qualities that are important for a physical therapist.”

Lauren said, “I feel very lucky to be working here. Campbell Clinic is so well respected, and every therapist here is so skilled and dedicated. I know being exposed to the actual cases I’m involved with will be a real help in my major.”

“When he first walked in the room, Dr. Phillips always asked about me. Not about my injury, but about me. At every visit, my parents and I had a million questions, and he patiently answered every one. I always felt I was in very good hands.”

— LAUREN CROOM



Dr. Barry Phillips