

Headline: Trey Uetrecht's positive attitude through adversity has inspired Ball State Football

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Philippians 4:13. "I can do all this through him who gives me strength."

The Bible verse, accompanied by a cross, is imprinted on the wristband of everyone in Ball State Football's locker room. On the opposite side, it reads "Trey Strong" in honor of redshirt freshman Trey Uetrecht.

"It's ironic today is April 13," head coach Mike Neu said after the team's annual spring game. "It kind of gives you the chills."

Just two months after his accident, Uetrecht was up walking around Scheumann Stadium, laughing with teammates and talking to fans with his left arm in a sling.

After the team's winter workouts concluded in February, Uetrecht spent the weekend at home in Oregonia, Ohio. About 30 minutes out from his house while returning to Ball State, he hit a patch of black ice, lost control of his truck, ramped a guard rail and crashed into a tree.

The tree impaled his left shoulder, severing his brachial plexus nerve, radial nerve and an artery.

"I was awake for probably 15 seconds, looked around, looked at my arm and kind of thought it was over," Uetrecht said.

He went unconscious shortly after seeing his arm. Uetrecht spent 12 days in ICU and a total of 32 days in the hospital.

Before the team heard about the severity of the accident, redshirt senior linebacker Jacob White said he expected Uetrecht to be back within a couple weeks.

"Once we heard it was very serious, we were obviously worried," White said. "From there, we were just praying and pulling for him, leaning on faith and doing everything we can for him."

White, along with a handful of other players, made the two-hour trip to Uetrecht's house to spend the day with him.

"That was one of the better days I've had since the accident," Uetrecht said.

Days before the spring game, Uetrecht came back to campus to speak to the team in a meeting. He talked about his accident, his injuries and what he had been going through both physically and mentally. In the immediate days following the accident, Uetrecht needed three people to help him take a shower as well as multiple people to help him use the bathroom and brush his teeth.

"He's such a young guy. He's not even finished with his freshman year of college yet," Neu said. "When he got up and spoke in front of the team, I hated that I had to go after him because he was so good, and he was so inspiring and I had a lump in my throat."

After the shock started to wear off, the team began thinking of ways to help Uetrecht and make sure he knew everyone had his back.

Each member of the team wrote Uetrecht a letter, and he would read them whenever he was having a rough day. Everyone signed his No. 57 jersey to give to him as a gift. Players and coaches started using the hashtag “TreyStrong” on social media.

Tim Tebow even reached out in a video on Twitter, encouraging Uetrecht to keep fighting and reminding him God is always with him.

One of the more meaningful tributes the team has participated in has been on the practice field. Uetrecht’s fellow inside linebackers started taking turns donning his No. 57 practice jersey on the field.

“It means the world to me,” redshirt junior Brandon Martin said. “When Trey came in, I did my best to take Trey under my wing and try to inspire him to be better as much as I could. Now, the roles are reversed. He’s inspiring me to be better each and every day.”

Neu said he can tell who is wearing No. 57 each day by who stands out during practice and who seems to have that extra motivation.

“Some of those guys, during that respective practice, you’re like, ‘Holy cow. We need you to practice like that all the time,’” Neu said.

While he said being the honorary team captain for the spring game was a bittersweet feeling, Uetrecht added the support he’s received opened his eyes to what he can still do for the team.

“Before this accident, if they said one of you has got to go through it, I would do it all over again for these guys,” Uetrecht said. “If it is an inspiration for these guys, and if they are playing for me and it gives them that edge, then it’s the best thing that can come out of this.”

Martin said Uetrecht has been an inspiration to the team all spring, and his impact will only make the team better.

“His mentality throughout the whole situation he’s been in is incredible,” Martin said. “It inspires all of us, and it’s going to continue to inspire us into next season.”

What has stuck out to Neu and the players is how Uetrecht has had a smile on his face throughout the entirety of his journey. White said he would have a hard time staying positive if he was put in the same situation, and the reason why is glaring.

Uetrecht will never play football again.

He said he has no feeling in his left arm, and if nerve reconstruction doesn’t get it working again, it would have to be amputated.

Uetrecht described the thought of not playing football as like “a knife to the heart,” but like White said, “If anyone’s going to battle this and get through this, it’s going to be Trey.”

Uetrecht has chosen to look at the positive side of his situation.

He said he’s thankful to help coach and attend classes in the fall. He’s thankful his legs and mind are OK. He’s thankful he can still talk to his family and teammates.

“After I heard all the stories about how I shouldn’t be here and how it was one of the worst accidents people had ever seen, you just kind of step back and take life as precious as it is,” Uetrecht said. “I shouldn’t be asking ‘Why?’ I should be saying ‘Thank you.’”

He's thankful he's still here.