

Vaulter injured in fall

By Alex Paul
Albany Democrat-Herald



Keegan Burnett, 23, a former Sweet Home High School pole vaulter, remains in the Intensive Care Unit at McKay-Dee Hospital Center in Ogden, Utah after a May 2 vaulting accident during a Twilight Meet at Weber State University.

Burnett, a member of the Idaho State University Bengals track and field team, flipped backwards off the pole vault landing mat. The university's vaulting pit was covered with padding to regulation lengths, but Burnett's head struck a portion of exposed concrete on the perimeter of the pit.

According to an Idaho State press release, Burnett was unconscious for 10 to 15 minutes after the accident and was taken to the hospital, which is near the athletic facility.

Burnett's parents, Rick and Alice of Sweet Home, rushed to Ogden and have been with their son since the accident.

"He's holding his own right now," Alice Burnett said this morning by telephone. "There's swelling in his brain but so far, they've been able to hold it down with medication. They are monitoring the pressure with a probe. They have had to increase his medication quite a bit and a nurse is dedicated to him at all times. His neurologist says he is pleased they are keeping the pressure down. It's day six, another day or so and the pressure should start going down."

Burnett said most schools extend their pole vaulting mats another four to five feet beyond the regulation lengths.

"When Keegan came down, he bounced and landed on the corner of the mat and his head slipped down on the concrete," Burnett said. "The back of his head is damaged and there is bleeding on the right side of his brain."

His mother added, "Keegan is in a wonderful place. The hospital is only about a mile from the track and he was in for a CAT scan in less than one hour. He's getting wonderful care. If people want to do something, they can pray for him, that's all they can do right now."

Burnett shares fifth place on the all-time list of vaulters at 13-feet for Sweet Home High School according to SHHS coach Billy Snow.

"Our thoughts and prayers are with Keegan and his entire family," Coach Snow said today. "He's a great kid who loves to pole vault."

Burnett also competed in cross country, soccer and wrestling for the Huskies.

A 2002 SHHS graduate, Burnett began his college career at Oregon State University, where he planned to study chemical engineering. A passion for pole vaulting led him to Lane Community College where he pushed himself to a school record 16- 51/4. Burnett then transferred to the University of Oregon and in January, he transferred to Idaho State University in Pocatello.

"He really likes it at Idaho State and he likes his coach," said his father, Rick. "He didn't even have to come to the meet at Weber State."

"He had already qualified for this week's Big Sky Conference championships in Pocatello. He just wouldn't pass up a chance to vault. He had been fighting shin splits and hadn't been able to vault for a week or so. He wanted to get in some vaults before the championships."

The Burnetts are staying in one of three homes owned by the hospital system and used by family members of patients. "Everyone has been wonderful to both Keegan and to us," Burnett said.

Burnett said the family has been told Keegan's medical expenses will be covered by the NCAA. He and his wife have been touched by the more than 70 messages left at a hospital-sponsored Web site CarePage.

His parents are posting daily updates on the site. On Monday, Alice Burnett wrote, "This morning he has a temp of 100.4. They have him covered in cold towels from his chin to his toes and the room temp is 65 degrees. He rather resembles a snowman. But they had told us before that it is very easy for him to develop a fever and very difficult to bring it down."

It's been a vexing spring for Idaho State vaulters. One of Burnett's teammates injured himself after snapping a pole in mid-vault at a previous meet and a female vaulter broke her leg after landing awkwardly.

Alex Paul can be reached at alex.paul@lee.net or 812-6076.

To leave Keegan Burnett a note of encouragement or prayer:

1. www.google.com
 2. Search McKay-Dee
 3. Click on McKay-Dee Hospital Center
 4. Click on CarePages link on the right hand side of the Web site page
 5. Click on visit a CarePage
 6. Sign up for a free account
 7. After signing in, visit VAULTERBOY
-

Copyright © 2007 Democrat-Herald