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## News

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### **Coach credits power of prayer for son's recovery**

by [Mary Childress](#)  
Daily Mail staff

CLAY, W.Va. -- Coach Frank Kleman watched from the sidelines as one of his Clay County High School football players went down.

It was impossible to tell, but it looked as if it might be a serious injury.

"I followed our trainer out onto the field," said Kleman. "I got about five yards out and realized it was my son."

It was a terrifying moment that the 52-year-old coach can now reflect upon with a sense of relief.

His son Luke - a safety and wide receiver - walked back into school Monday just 10 days after suffering what doctors at Ruby Memorial Hospital said was a life-threatening head injury.

Frank credits the prayers of family, friends and a multitude of total strangers for Luke's recovery.

The Clay Panthers were on the road against Tyler Consolidated on Oct. 31 when Luke, 16, got hurt early in the fourth quarter.

Luke had attempted to tackle a Tyler player when he was kned in the head by one of his own teammates who also was trying to bring down ball carrier.

"I'm glad the trainer got out there first as Luke wasn't breathing," his father said. "But when he was turned over, he began to breathe. Luke couldn't talk at first. He just seemed to mumble. And he said he couldn't feel his feet. I just stood back and kept quiet and prayed."

So did a lot of other people.

The Rev. Bill Dawson of Sistersville's First United Methodist Church was in the stands. His son, Nathan, plays center for Tyler Consolidated.

"When Luke went down, the players automatically went to the sidelines and got down on their knees," Dawson said. "I went onto the field and introduced myself to Frank.

"The first thing Frank asked me was to pray for his son. Then the teams and coaches came together and knelt in prayer on the field.

"When the players and coaches learned the severity of Luke's injury, these players that were once face to face in battle were unified in prayer."

The game was called off with 11 minutes to go and Tyler Consolidated leading 54-15.

"Tyler won the game, but as the players left the field you didn't hear the usual cheering or yelling," Dawson said. "It was a somber crowd."

Tyler Coach Rob Caldwell felt that it was not appropriate to keep on playing under the circumstances. He urged Frank to go with his son to the hospital.

Luke was flown to Morgantown, about 60 air miles from the football field. He spent three days in the intensive care unit.

"When he was first admitted they didn't know what was wrong," Frank said. "They couldn't find anything at first, but then Luke started having panic attacks. They hooked him up to an EEG for 24 hours, did an MRI, but didn't discover anything with either of those tests."

In the meantime, Dawson said the prayer coordinator for his church as well as ministers from other denominations, many who had been in the stands during the game, were also praying and getting prayer chains going by calling other ministers.

After the battery of tests, doctors surmised that the panic attacks were brought on by the head injury, Frank said.

Luke was released from ICU to a step-down unit, and he started getting better.

But almost four days elapsed before he was able to walk.

"He was so weak that when he got up he about fell on his face," his father said. "But he gradually got stronger."

And there were some other side effects.

"He doesn't remember anything about being in the hospital," Frank said. "Luke remembers going outside in a wheelchair on (the following) Tuesday but nothing about the injury."

He was released from the hospital on Nov. 4. The next day he had a series of panic attacks, but other than that his recovery has been swift.

"As far as anything physical, he has no paralysis, no problems walking or anything else," his dad said. "He hasn't had any attacks since then so we know he's doing better."

The entire family is helping him take things slow, though. They kept him out of school for almost a week until they were sure he was ready to go back.

"The only thing Luke has to work on is his memory," Frank said. "We've talked with his teachers and they're going to let us know how he does."

"If he's not ready and goes home, we're not going to let him stay by himself. We've got someone there who will look after him."

Luke played basketball for the Panthers last season but he's going to have to wait for a while.

"We visited our family doctor Friday and it will be a while as far as playing sports again," his father said. "Luke's not going to participate in basketball for at least a month or until his doctors release him."

Frank, who teaches history, was a good athlete himself in his younger days.

A native of Boyertown, Pa., he played football at Fairmont State.

Frank said he believes it was the prayers of fellow players, friends and family and strangers that made the difference in his son's recovery.

Frank and Luke's mom, DeeDee, spent the four days in the hospital with him, sleeping in chairs and praying that the injury wasn't severe.

Older brother Jared, who lives in South Carolina, also was doing his share of praying and making constant phone calls to the family, Frank said.

"God answered people's prayers," he said. "Even though a lot of people didn't know Luke, they cared enough to pray for him. The prayers of Clay County and West Virginia made the difference."

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