

New Mexico Activities Association

Student-Athlete Spotlight

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Carthel Returns to the Court after Crash

By Tyler Dunkel, NMAA Sports Information Director

In the blink of an eye, everything you know and love can change and for Reagan Carthel, a senior at Melrose High School, that change happened this past September during a trip to Cloudcroft over Labor Day weekend.

Carthel has been a vital member of the Buffaloes' volleyball and basketball teams since she was an eighth grader and has been a part of several successful teams along the way. Although she enjoys playing volleyball, basketball is her true passion.

"Volleyball is a mental game and I feel like if you're not mentally tough you will have a hard time being successful. The mental part of the game has helped me grow into a tough minded person. Basketball is my favorite sport. I love the atmosphere in the gym and the fact you can control your own abilities. I think the hard you work in the game of basketball the more successful you can be because it is more about athletic ability than mental toughness."

A self-proclaimed "country girl," Carthel embraces the Melrose small town feel and tight knit community.

"I love the small town feel and the fact that everyone is so close. I have always liked the country. My family owns a farm and a dairy, so growing up I was always helping out and I just grew to love the country way of life. Melrose fits that country life-style. I just feel at home here."

Then, this past Labor Day, her life was changed in an accident. While on a trip with her boyfriend Wyatt Williams and his family, Carthel and Williams decided to take one more ride on the family's motor bike before heading home from a long weekend.

On the way back from about a 10 minute ride down a dirt road, Carthel, who was driving at the time, lost control of the bike going around a curve and went off into a ditch on the side of the road. The front tire of the bike hit first, forcing Carthel to hit the front handle bars, throwing her about five yards from the bike and knocking her unconscious and throwing Williams about 20 yards..

Williams tried to get Carthel up but couldn't as she had not regained consciousness by this point. Carthel was having trouble breathing and was given a ride back to their camp by a good Samaritan passing by but throughout the 10 minute ride back, Carthel was in and out of consciousness.

Upon arriving at the camp site, Williams' family members, one a doctor and the other nurse, evaluated her and said they thought she had just broken a rib or two. So, the family packed up and headed back to Melrose. During the seven and a half hour drive, Carthel was extremely sick but not in serious pain, according to what she can remember.



It wasn't until later that evening when she was getting ready for bed that she knew something more than just a broken rib was wrong.

"I didn't want to go to the hospital. I called my coach and told him I had been in a wreck but that I was okay and I would call him in the morning because we had a game the next day. By the time I got home it had been about seven and a half hours since the accident. I wasn't in a lot of pain but when I moved certain ways it hurt pretty badly. I just thought I had broken a few ribs because I had broken ribs before so I wasn't too worried about it."

Later that evening at the hospital the doctors ordered a CT Scan and revealed that she had indeed broken a rib and that the rib had lacerated her kidney in several spots. Carthel was bleeding internally and required surgery immediately. She was flown to Lubbock for surgery, where the doctors inserted a stent into her kidney but by the time surgery was performed 30 percent of her kidney had died.

When asked what was going through her mind when she found out her kidney was damaged, Carthel had only one thing on her mind.

"I was really worried more about when I was going to get to play again. That was all that went through my mind. At the time, I really didn't realize how serious my injuries were but looking back I think, 'Wow, I almost died.' I truly feel that God has put me here for a reason now."

She continued, "This experience really opened my eyes to a lot of things. It has changed the way I live my life now. It's made me think that if I would have died what things should I have gone back and fixed in my life. I feel like the little stuff in life is what I need to pay attention to more now. Thank God I was wearing a helmet because the entire side sticker on the helmet was torn off, so I had hit my head really hard. If, I wasn't wearing a helmet, who knows."

Ever since her release from the hospital and return to school, Carthel has been thinking about rejoining her team as quickly as possible.

"You know how doctors are. They will say several different things. But, the doctors did say there is a possibility I could be back and some say that when I get the stent out I could be fully recovered. I'm hoping for the best. I have been with my team ever since I came back to school. I've been to every practice and every game. I sit on the bench and try and help as much as I can. I feel like if I'm not out on the court playing I need to give the team something and this is my way right now of doing that. It's hard but I'm doing my best."

When asked about her faith helping her through this time, Carthel was quick to agree it has been the one thing she has relied on the most.

"Oh yes, my faith is what has helped me the most through all of this. All the prayers, cards, phone calls and visits in the hospital have meant so much. You know Melrose and Elida have a pretty big rivalry and Coach Darrell Chenault came to the hospital to visit me and the Elida girls sent flowers and that was just so meaningful to me. Without God I know for a fact that I could not have gotten through this."

On November 1st, nearly two months following the accident, Reagan was cleared by doctors to return to competition. The stent was removed from her kidney and Carthel rejoined her team in time to play in the district volleyball tournament.

Carthel said it was the best news she could have received and thanked everyone who supported her through this difficult time.

"I want to thank the Elida girls' volleyball team and Darrell Chenault for their support and putting on an auction to help raise money for me. Thank you to everyone for the phone calls, text messages, cards and flowers. I want to thank my family, my friends, my teammates, my coaches and the administration at Melrose especially for supporting me during this time. I want to also thank Texico, Floyd and Dora for reaching out and to everyone for sending their prayers my way."