



INSIDE ATHLETICS

Football player plays game with concussion symptoms



Sadie Rucker Staff Photographer

Players hold up their helmets in a huddle Oct. 19 during warm ups before the game against Auburn.

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During the second game of the season, one UA football player got his first concussion after playing football since sixth grade. He missed two games because of his concussion but returned for the Texas A&M game while still displaying symptoms.

"I didn't want to miss the Texas A&M game, so I kind of finessed my way around the protocol and got cleared to play in the A&M," said Colton Jackson, a senior and offensive lineman who retired after the Oct. 19 game. "But I still had a concussion during the A&M game, and it made it worse."

Jackson said he passed all of the tests necessary to return to play, including word memorization tests, a balance test, a vision test and TRAZER, a computer-based simulation program. However, he still had bad headaches. Jackson played for the entirety of the A&M game, which he said was difficult.

"To me, the reason I tried to push through was because I didn't want my headache to prevent me from playing," Jackson said.

A concussion is a traumatic brain injury caused by a blow to the head, which makes the brain bounce or twist inside of the skull, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

"With a concussion, you don't really look at the real seriousness of it," Jackson said. "You don't look at what it does

to your brain. You just feel the side effects."

Long-term effects of concussions include trouble concentrating, memory problems, irritability and other personality changes, sensitivity to light and noise, sleep disturbances, depression and other psychological problems and disorders of smell and taste.

To return to games, athletes must not show any symptoms, complete a return-to-activity plan, be at or above their previous baseline testing and tolerate exertional protocol without returning symptoms, according to Arkansas Athletics.

"When you get hurt, the protocol for injuries is so long for any injury, you don't even want to tell the trainers that you're hurt," Jackson said.

Student-athletes, their parents or guardians, coaches, the team physician and other officials are required to sign a form noting they understand the requirement to immediately report concussion symptoms to the UA Sports Medicine staff, according to Arkansas Athletics.

Student-athlete and their parents or guardians must also sign a release acknowledging that helmets cannot prevent serious head or neck injuries while participating in football, according to Arkansas Athletics.

Jackson retired after the Oct. 19 game because of problems from an injury-related back surgery he had in 2018. Jackson said that he rushed through recovery because he did not want to miss the season.

After spending the off-season in rehabilitation from his surgery, Jackson returned to play three weeks earlier than expected.

"You only get 12 opportunities each season to – basically how coaches put it – build your resume," Jackson said.

The ultimate goal for many players is to get to the NFL and get to the next level, Jackson said. Every game builds players' resumes, and missing games takes away from that.

When someone has a concussion, Jackson said that his teammates will say things like, "Oh, you just have a headache. You're fine."

De'Vion Warren, a junior and a wide receiver for the football team, has had two concussions while playing with the Razorbacks.

"We just try to make sure that their morale is not low, because for some people when they get hurt, football is the only thing they do," Warren said. "So, once that's taken from them they just have to sit back and wait to get better."

"That's what you think at the same time and you're like what do I look like just missing a game because I have a headache and what do I look like missing a game just because I threw up a few times," Jackson said.

If players have different injuries, such as sprains or a broken bone, or have a boot or a sling, they have "something to show for it" compared to a concussion, Jackson said.

"You want to play through what you can play through, and in most cases that's good," Jackson said. "But, in a lot of cases that's not good to do for your body and your brain."

A representative for the Office for Sport Concussion Research was not available to comment.

Freshman player assists record season for Razorback soccer

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Darting past the opposition, she had the chance to score and put her team in the lead. Though she had many opportunities to put herself on the board, she passed the ball toward one of her squad members, making the second goal in the game and landing them in the second round of the NCAA Tournament.

Anna Podojil, a freshman, has had a record season with the Women's Razorback soccer team, which led to a dominant performance in the SEC tournament, where the team made the finals. The Hogs also played in the NCAA tournament, earning the right to play the first round in Fayetteville.

"It was always a dream of mine to play college soccer here," Podojil said. "I kind of always had visions of playing here, but now, just everything is coming into place."

Haley VanFossen, a junior defender, thinks this winning season could not have been possible without freshmen like Podojil who stepped up and helped throughout the season, she said.

"I mean, having a freshman just come out and be a spark for us like that is amazing, and I am so excited to see what she does in the next couple of years, because she is just off the charts," VanFossen said.

Podojil found her passion for soccer as an 8-year-old recreational player in Bentonville, Arkansas, and has not stopped playing since, she said. When

she started out, Podojil did not have any local players to look up to, and the Razorback soccer program was in its infancy, so she looked up to national players.

Podojil grew up watching the U.S. Women's National Team and discovered popular players like Abby Wambach and Alex Morgan, past and current U.S. forwards.

"I just like (Wambach's) passion for the game and how hard she played," Podojil said. "Just seeing her play at the highest level in the Olympics and the World Cup – I'd always dreamed of being there and following in her footsteps."

Podojil moved with her family to Cincinnati, Ohio, before she started high school. There, she discovered club sports.

"The biggest change came when I moved to Cincinnati, Ohio, and just like the jump of the level of soccer was really big," Podojil said. "I started playing on a better club team, and we started traveling more and playing in bigger tournaments."

Podojil joined the club Cincinnati United Premier, winning a national championship her junior year, she said.

Following her successful high school and club career, Podojil came to the UofA as a forward.

She was excited to join an Arkansas team, having looked up to Razorback athletes since childhood and attending many UA sporting events with her sister, she said.

Podojil found success during her freshman year with the soccer team, with one of her most prolific matches being against UNC, where she scored the opening goal against the Tarheels.

The Razorbacks were the only

team to beat UNC during the fall 2019 season, according to UNC Athletics.

Podojil deemed this victory her favorite moment of the season.

"As a team, that was the game that we came together, and it felt so special afterwards," Podojil said.

Katie Lund, a senior goalkeeper, thinks Podojil's success comes from her humility and desire to be a team player, she said.

"Anna this year was incredible," Lund said. "She really is a star and she would never take the credit for herself."

Lund admires Podojil's ability to stay focused and serious on the field while still having a sense of humor, she said.

Going into the remainder of her collegiate soccer career, Podojil hopes to accomplish even more than she did this year, and help the team continue to push and go further, she said.

"This year, we did accomplish a lot, but one of my biggest goals is to keep winning SEC championships and find a way to eventually win the SEC tournament title and keep making long runs in the NCAA tournament," Podojil said.

When Podojil graduates, she hopes to pursue club sports, preferably on the West Coast, and possibly even the national team, she said.

"I think in these past few years, professional for women has kind of exploded, and there are so many more opportunities," Podojil said. "I think that if I continue to develop and get better, then I can have a shot at playing professionally one day."



Anna Podojil (left) and Stefani Doyle (center) play Sept. 15 during the Razorbacks' game against North Carolina.



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