

Knee twist that laid low a soccer player



AGONY: Raza needed surgery

THE CRUNCHING tackle which sent footballer Raza Barkatali sprawling to the ground was a cause for celebration. After more than a year out of the sport, it was the first real test for his rebuilt anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) and his knee felt fine. For the 33-year-old IT worker it was the end of a long haul back to fitness, during which he feared he'd never play again.

The injury happened when Raza was enjoying his weekly five-a-side game and his foot stuck on the artificial surface.

"I trapped the ball and went to move right, but my knee went in the opposite direction," says Raza, from Sale, Cheshire. "It felt weird, but after a few minutes I carried on playing. I could run in a straight line but if I tried to turn it felt like the knee was going to buckle."

His GP diagnosed a pull of one of the quadriceps muscles in the thigh and advised strengthening exercises. Three weeks later, there was no improvement. Physiotherapy also failed to pinpoint the problem. "Five weeks after the injury it was still no better," says Raza. "I was still playing football every week but I had no confidence in the knee. It was about the same time Michael Owen tore his ACL." Then during another match, as he hurdled a fallen opponent, Raza landed on his left leg and felt excruciating pain.

Finally, nine weeks after suffering the injury, he was referred to a surgeon, Sanjiv Jari, at the Manchester Sports Medicine Clinic. An MRI scan showed that Raza had torn his ACL. "It meant all that physio had been a waste of time," says Raza.

A graft of the patella tendon from his undamaged knee was successfully used to replace the torn ligament. That graft can be taken from either knee but Mr Jari used the good knee because it can make rehabilitation easier. The graft becomes the new ligament, restoring stability to the knee. Within three hours of surgery Raza was beginning exercises to regain motion.

He was in bed for a week, on crutches for two weeks and off work for two months. It was not for another seven months – a full year after the injury – that he was able to play football again.

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"I've lost a bit of speed but I can twist and turn perfectly. My aim was to play football again and I've been given that opportunity."

● For more information on ACL tears and the surgical reconstruction, visit www.thekneedoc.co.uk