Triple Treatment: Sisters Undergo ACL Surgeries to Keep Them on the Court by Erica Kirk

The three Sidney sisters are exceptional not only because all are award-winning basketball players, but also because they share identical two-inch vertical scars on their knees for the same injury. And all three — Elon, 19, Jelleah, 18, and Briana, 15 — turned to orthopedic surgeon Neil Watnik, MD, when they tore their anterior cruciate ligaments (ACLs).

"I have seen ACL injuries run in families, but the Sidney sisters' case is unusual," said Dr. Watnik, who practices at LIJ Medical Center. "I've taken care of a husband and wife with ACL tears, parents and their children and even siblings. But I've never had to treat three sisters with the same injury." Jelleah and Elon have had the procedure on both knees, while Briana has torn "only" one ACL.

The ACL is one of four major knee ligaments. Critical to knee stability, the ACL prevents excessive motion of the joint. Many patients who sustain ACL injuries complain of their knee "giving out" and require surgery.

Most ACL tears are sportsrelated, often occurring when an athlete is pivoting or landing from a jump. Female athletes have a higher risk of ACL injury while participating in competitive sports. "Over the past 10 to 15 years it has become clear that ACL tears are far more common in females than males," noted Dr. Watnik.
"Many studies of collegiate
athletes show females are two
to eight times more likely to
tear an ACL than males,
depending on the sport. In
basketball — the Sidney
sisters' sport — females are
four times more likely to
sustain a tear."

One reason for this disparity is associated with each gender's way of moving, Dr. Watnik explained. "Women tend to land from a jump to a more extended upright position than men, which makes them

more prone to injury. Certain exercises to help females land with a more flexed knee might help prevent ACL tears."

Hundreds of trophies throughout the Sidney sisters' home attest to their skill. Despite past injuries, they continue to excel in the sport they love: basketball. Elon earned a scholarship to St. John's University, where she is enjoying her freshman year and continues to work extremely hard — often practicing twice per day. Jelleah recently returned

from a basketball championship in Moscow. As a senior at St. Michael Academy, she is fielding numerous university scholarship offers. Briana, a sophomore at St. Michael Academy, also plays basketball there.

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Getting the right care has allowed Jelleah, Briana and Elon Sidney to pursue their goals.