

Rodgers

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Rodgers emphasized after the game he wants to keep playing as long as there's any chance the Packers could still reach the postseason.

Philadelphia made the play-offs with a 9-8 record last season, so there's the possibility a late surge could get the Packers back in contention. But it's hard to imagine that kind of late run for a team that has dropped seven of its last eight games.

"There are obviously a lot of other conversations that come into play once you're eliminated, and I'll be open to all of those conversations," Rodgers said after the game. "Pride comes to mind. Love of the game. But there's other factors obviously that would come into play should we be mathematically eliminated."

One of those factors is the chance for the Packers to get a closer look at 2020 first-round pick Jordan Love, who has made just one career start.

Love took over for the injured Rodgers and looked better than he had in any of his other sporadic

appearances, going 6 of 9 for 113 yards and finding Christian Watson for a 63-yard touchdown.

"I felt a lot more prepared," Love said after the game. "Like I say, it just comes down to reps, getting those reps and being comfortable executing those plays. So like I said, the more reps I can get, the more I can get in those situations, the more comfortable I'll be."

WHAT'S WORKING

The Packers gained over 5 yards per carry. ... Keisean Nixon had two kickoff returns of over 50 yards and finished with five returns for 172 yards.

WHAT NEEDS WORK

Green Bay's porous run defense hit bottom Sunday as Philadelphia rushed for 363 yards, the second-highest total in Eagles history and the most the Packers had allowed in a game since 1977, according to ESPN Stats & Info. LaFleur said the Packers had over 20 missed tackles and called it "by far our worst tackling performance that I've seen here. The Packers are allowing 154.8 yards

rushing per game to rank 31st out of 32 NFL teams, ahead of only Houston. They're giving up 5 yards per carry to rank 29th.

STOCK UP

Watson caught four passes for 110 yards and a touchdown. The rookie second-round pick from North Dakota State has six touchdown catches over his last three games. ... LB Justin Hollins recorded a sack in his first game for the Packers, who claimed him off waivers from the Los Angeles Rams. ... After gaining just 23 yards from scrimmage in a loss to Tennessee a week earlier, RB A.J. Dillon bounced back with eight carries for 64 yards and a touchdown plus three catches for 24 yards.

STOCK DOWN

S Darnell Savage was replaced in the starting lineup by Rudy Ford and eventually left with a foot injury. This marked the first non-starting appearance in the 2019 first-round pick's 58-game career. ... CB Rasul Douglas appeared to get beaten on each of Jalen Hurts' two touchdown passes. ... Green Bay's continued struggles to

slow down rushing attacks will put even more heat on defensive coordinator Joe Barry, particularly since the Packers believed during the offseason they could have one of the best defenses in the league. ... WR Sammy Watkins played just four offensive snaps and wasn't targeted, the second straight game in which he didn't catch a pass.

INJURED

Other than the injuries to Rodgers and Savage, LB De'Vondre Campbell (knee) missed a fourth straight game and WR Romeo Doubs (ankle) sat out a third consecutive game.

KEY NUMBER

2006—The last time the Packers had a record as bad as 4-8 through their first 12 games of a season. That 2006 Packers squad won its last four games to finish 8-8, though it missed the playoffs.

NEXT STEPS

The Packers head to Chicago (3-9) seeking to beat the Bears for an eighth consecutive time.

Villas

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"It was terrifying. We didn't even understand that she had two defects until six months after the first surgery, when her doctor said that they needed to go back in and band aid this second defect," Jocelyn's mother, Jonelle, added. "Every surgery, she had drainage tubes coming out. There were external pacemaker wires coming out. Multiple IVs. Then we walk in on the morning after her second surgery and she's standing up in the crib, with all those tubes, going 'Mumma!', but for six weeks after each surgery she couldn't be picked up under her arms like a normal baby."

It was during the same timeframe that Jocelyn would find refuge in sports, with one in particular capturing her attention.

"I started dancing when I was four or five, I was able to start softball when I was eight and started volleyball when I was 10, and out of everything, volleyball was my biggest interest because I had no restrictions," she said. "There was no extra equipment that I had to wear, no protections or anything like that. I could just play and be myself."

The nature of Jocelyn's surgeries limited her options.

"I couldn't play any contact sports, so basketball was out. I had to quit gymnastics in case I fell on my side. In softball, I had to wear a chest protector so that my chest wouldn't crack open if a ball hit me. I couldn't even do track until my last heart

surgery because my heart couldn't take the stress of it," she said. "A volleyball is bigger, so if I get hit by one it's not centralized to my chest."

"Unless my scar is showing, people don't know."

Jocelyn's early surgeries were merely placeholders in order to provide her with time to grow enough to support a far more extensive repair, which came in August of 2018 when she was 13 years old.

The procedure, called the "Ross-Konno procedure", involves removing the non-functioning aortic valve and moving the working pulmonary valve to its place. It is essentially a case of surgeons playing musical chairs with the heart.

"I had a narrowing in my aorta, so basically the blood was getting caught and being regurgitated back into my heart. They took out my aortic valve, put my pulmonary valve into where the aortic one was, then took a cadaver and put its pulmonary into the missing spot," Jocelyn said. "It's pretty simple, but there was a lot of scar tissue from previous surgeries around the aorta, so as they were trying to cut that out, they nicked my coronary, which caused another six months of recovery time."

Each surgery required Jocelyn to be on a heart-lung bypass, which stopped her heart all four times but did not blunt her sense of humor about it.

"I've died four times in my life and come back. I like to think of it like that, because it's honestly cool," she said.

After getting the all clear

from her doctors, Jocelyn jumped back into sports as a freshman in 2019, but another challenge lurked around the corner.

As the COVID-19 pandemic gripped the world in the winter of 2020, Jocelyn developed a cough without warning, but was initially not cause for concern.

"That cough was like when you have a cold, and you wake up in the morning and you need to clear out all that phlegm. After an hour, I was fine," Jocelyn said. "We were going to let it pass but then we were at a volleyball tournament and the referee had to call time because I was coughing so badly. That's when we realized how bad it was."

Doctors struggled to pinpoint the cause of Jocelyn's cough, prescribing her different antibiotics, one of which caused a particularly scary allergic reaction.

"I was diagnosed with Histoplasmosis, and I was put on an antibody for it. Two weeks later, I had to call my mom home because I couldn't use my legs," Jocelyn said. "I was immobile for two weeks."

Doctor's eventually surmised that Jocelyn's illness had triggered a previously undetected autoimmune disease known as atypical Wegener's Vasculitis, which specifically attacks a person's sinuses, lungs and kidneys.

A six-month treatment of high dose prednisone and weekly injections of an immunosuppressant followed, with Jocelyn losing over 30 pounds and all of her muscle mass in the process.

"I weighed 150 pounds in

the fall and dropped down to 92. People did not recognize me when I went back to school. Some people called me anorexic," she said.

The ordeal also made breathing an arduous undertaking.

"I couldn't breathe long enough to finish a four-piece chicken nugget from McDonald's. I would not have been able to have this conversation. I'd be out of breath after two words," she said. "I had a Fitbit watch and I was checking it every five minutes. Every time I got up, or every time I would talk for a bit... anything that could raise my heart rate, I'd look at it and if my heart rate was above 120, I had to sit there and watch five minutes go by."

"Unless my scar is showing, people don't know."

By the time her sophomore season rolled around in the fall of 2020, Villas had healed well enough to star for Menominee's JV volleyball team, outwardly showing no ill effects.

The grind of the volleyball season did eventually wear Jocelyn down. Abnormal back pain followed by a trip to the doctors found that her scoliosis, which had been mild, was now significantly worse due to the malnutrition and muscle loss suffered during the recovery process from Wegener's Vasculitis. Unfortunately, with the case not severe enough to require surgery and Jocelyn too old for a brace, the decision was made to plow forward and take part in softball season in the spring of 2021.

It was on the diamond that Jocelyn discovered the true

cause of her pain.

"I felt something snap and I just thought that it was a joint popping and getting air out. Then it was kind of sore, and that went away but I kept having pain in my lower back on my right side that wrapped around my hip flexor," she said. "We went in for an MRI in my back and ended up getting three because the wrong one kept getting ordered, and one of them was just low enough for them to see my hip and see that I had completely torn the labrum."

Surgery followed in August of 2021, and a recovery time of eight-to-twelve weeks torpedoed any hopes Jocelyn had of making it onto the volleyball court as a junior.

Jocelyn underwent grueling physical therapy in order to be ready in time for her senior season, where she shined as a backrow specialist for the Maroons.

"It's been rough for her, for sure, but she's a kid that's never said die," Menominee's volleyball coach Sarah Betzinger said. "Every time, she comes back and pushes hard. You cannot keep her down."

"From day one, I was always worried about my heart beating faster and needing to take a break. With sports, I have people tell me that there's no way that I've had four open heart surgeries," Jocelyn said. "It makes me feel like I fit in. It makes me feel normal. I have never wanted anyone to feel bad for me, or give me special treatment. That wouldn't make me feel normal anymore."

"Unless my scar is showing, people don't know."

SPORTS

Wednesday, November 30, 2022

Beating the odds

Menominee's Villas named recipient of Gil Heard Courageous Athlete Award

By MATT LEHMANN

EagleHerald Sports Editor

MENOMINEE—*"Unless my scar is showing, people don't know."*

Jocelyn Villas walks off the court and takes a seat on the bench of the Menominee girls volleyball team. After a few moments, the senior back row specialist begins to shift in her chair; first in one direction, then the other. She stands up and sits down, her body in a perpetual state of motion.

Villas fidgets on the bench in order to keep her back from locking up. Her spine, afflicted with scoliosis, curves in the shape of an 'S'. Her surgically repaired hip often aches along with it. She deals with the pain, smiling and high-fiving her teammates before checking back in and throwing herself across the court with reckless abandon.

The unassuming spectators that dot the stands think nothing of this, and why would they? After all, what Villas is doing is nothing special, just something that hundreds of student-athletes do on any given night.

When you learn her full story, the fact that Villas is doing any of this at all is nothing short of a miracle.

The mark on her chest, a mark born out of four open-heart surgeries by the age 12, tells the story. The story of what ones' hard work, determination and sheer force of will can accomplish.

For her strength, courage and dedication to overcoming adversity, The Upper Peninsula Sportswriters and Sportscasters Association have named Villas as the recipient of this year's Gil Heard Courageous Athlete Award.

The Gil Heard Courageous Athlete Award recognizes one student-athlete in the Upper Peninsula that has beaten long odds to thrive in the world of athletics. The award is named in honor of the late Gil Heard, who was a sports information director at Northern Michigan University for 23 years and is a member of the U.P. Sports Hall of Fame

Born with two heart defects, although the family only knew of one initially, Villas underwent her first open-heart surgery at two months old. The procedure fixed two large holes in Villas's heart, but also uncovered the second defect.

"Her first procedure should have been a one-and-done," Jocelyn's father, Telly, said. "It's considered to be a



Menominee's Jocelyn Villas sets a dig during a match against Gladstone on August 25. Villas has been named the winner of the Gil Heard Courage Athlete Award, which goes to a student-athlete that has overcome long odds to thrive in athletics.

cakewalk in terms of open-heart surgeries."

Two more surgeries followed, one at eight months and the other at two-and-a-half years old, in order to repair

a hole in the heart's mitral valve and remove scar tissue that had built up around the opening of the aortic valve.

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Green Bay Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers reacts during the second half against the Philadelphia Eagles, Sunday in Philadelphia.

Rodgers 'feeling better,' but status remains uncertain

By STEVE MEGARGEE

Associated Press

GREEN BAY—Aaron Rodgers wants to keep playing through his growing list of injuries as long as the struggling Green Bay Packers still have a mathematical chance of reaching the playoffs.

The Packers' postseason hopes remain alive, if only in the technical sense, after a 40-33 loss at Philadelphia on Sunday dropped their record to 4-8. Rodgers, already playing with a broken right thumb, left with injured ribs in the second half.

"I know he's feeling better today," Packers coach Matt LaFleur said Monday. "I think we'll know more in the next couple of days."

LaFleur said the Packers planned to continue relying on Rodgers if the four-time MVP is healthy enough to play.

"Aaron's the starting quarterback," LaFleur said. "He's battled through a lot throughout the course of his career. It's pretty well documented and I think he's been able to play at a pretty high level through a lot of different situations. So again, we'll take it one game at a time and make the best decision moving forward."

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LOCAL SCHEDULE

TODAY'S EVENTS

No events scheduled

THURSDAY'S EVENTS

WRESTLING

De Pere at Coleman, 6:30 p.m.
Marionette at Luxemburg-Casco, 6:30 p.m.

GIRLS BASKETBALL

Stephenson at Norway, 6:45 p.m.

BOYS BASKETBALL

White Lake at STAA, 6 p.m.
Marion at Gillett, 7 p.m.
Sevastopol at Peshtigo, 7:30 p.m.
Crivitz at Manawa, 7:30 p.m.