

Lassen hopes to practice with Lions this week

Written by Jim Ecker

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Matt Lassen has been cleared by his doctor to begin practicing with the Linn-Mar basketball team again and he's hopeful of playing in games in a few weeks.

Lassen suffered a severe concussion and head injuries during a game against Iowa City West Dec. 9 at Linn-Mar when he fell and twice hit his head on the floor.

His doctor cleared him this past Wednesday to begin working out, but so far he's been practicing on his own with Linn-Mar trainer Jill Hendricks to get in shape. He hopes to begin practicing with the team again soon, perhaps this week.

"Right now I'm not quite in shape and my balance is a little off," Lassen said Saturday night after Linn-Mar played Xavier. "Once I get in shape he (the doctor) said I can start to practice."

He's working hard to get in condition.

"Lots of sprints, getting my shot back," he said. "My shot is really good right now. Dribbling and ballhandling, stuff like that. Normal stuff. A lot of balance work.

"I'm pretty close," he said. "I'm just about in shape right now. It's kind of up to Jill. She makes the call on when I start to practice."

Linn-Mar Coach Chris Robertson wants Lassen to have two full weeks of practice with the team before he plays in a game. "Our main goal right now is to have me back 100 percent by the week of substate," Lassen said.

The Class 4A substate tournament begins the week of Feb. 20. The third-ranked Lions (9-2) are the defending state champions. Lassen, a 6-foot-4 junior, is one of Linn-Mar's top players and already has committed to play Division I basketball at Albany (N.Y.).

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Lassen has another doctor's appointment in two weeks. If everything goes as planned, he could be playing shortly after that if he gets final permission.

"If I do get cleared and I do get back, the first couple of games I probably won't start, I probably won't play all that much," he said. "We'll see."

Robertson plans to proceed cautiously, but he likes what he's seen so far.

"Watching him run and shoot, he's getting there," Robertson said Saturday. "He's a lot better than he was three or four weeks ago. We're hopeful, just for his sake."

"Their family, they want him to get back out here and play and I know he wants to be out here with his team."

Lassen spent four days in area hospitals, including two days in the intensive care unit at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics in Iowa City. He had bleeding on the brain and swelling, then spent several weeks at home in Marion after being released from the hospital.

His head has recovered from the traumatic injury. "That's all healing really well," he said.

Lassen is confident he'll play again this season.

"I was a little surprised I didn't get (fully) cleared last week," he said. "I really feel like I can play right now. Of course, safety first, but I'm really confident."