

Keegan Burnett bouncing back from track injury

Vaulter back home

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courtesy of [New Era](#).

By Sean C. Morgan

Sweet Home alumnus Keegan Burnett, the Idaho State University pole vaulter who sustained a critical head injury last month at a meet, is recovering well and has returned to Sweet Home with his family to continue his recovery.

Burnett was injured during a meet at Weber State University on May 3 and taken to McKay-Dee Hospital in Ogden, Utah. He returned to Sweet Home on June 6. His mother and father, Alice and Rick Burnett drove him home, stopping by Pocatello on the way to take care of loose ends.



Keegan Burnett

"I think I'm doing pretty well," Burnett said. "I can't really work out or run or drive for a month or two."

Right now he is working with a speech therapist in Eugene to get his cognitive functions working more smoothly.

"We'll do some neurological and psychological tests to make sure my brain's working fine," he said.

Burnett can recall planting his pole and then tumbling around on the mat, he said.

He fell off the mat and struck his head on concrete and lost consciousness. He doesn't remember telling the medics that he needed get back on the field and jump.

He does remember getting a CAT scan after reaching the hospital and then nothing for about two weeks.

That's because Burnett was kept heavily sedated after the accident for about 10 days. A 9-inch piece of his skull was removed and frozen to give his brain room to swell without injuring it. The bone was frozen until May 18 when it was reattached to his skull, and he started trying to talk the same day.

Alice Burnett reported that Keegan was "over the hump when it comes to survival on May 14. He remained on one sedative at that point.

Keegan Burnett spent the last part of May in therapy.

The brain is like a muscle, Burnett said. His recovery now is just like resting a muscle after an injury.

Being hospitalized for 32 days took a toll on him physically as well, he said. He lost 45 pounds of muscle while hospitalized.

His parents went to Ogden and stayed with him throughout his recovery.

They didn't know what to expect and didn't think they would be gone that long, Rick Burnett said. Then

it sank in that they would be there a long time. After a month had passed, they were surprised to see their son ready for discharge.

They had been told Keegan would spend weeks in therapy before he could leave, Rick Burnett said. During one transitional therapy phase, they were told it would last one to three weeks, but he was only in it less than 24 hours.

"Once he started to get better, he started getting better real fast," Burnett said. "He just made huge strides."

"He made the same kind of improvement in speech too," Alice Burnett said.

Keegan Burnett admitted that the recovery is frustrating now.

"Pretty much anything I want to do I can't do," he said.

He hopes to return to the University of Oregon in the fall to finish his degree in human physiology. He is not sure what kind of work he will do, he said. He may become some kind of doctor or a physician's assistant. He also is interested in sports medicine.

He also will have minors in organic chemistry and psychology.

The incident hasn't deterred his love for his sport. He is looking forward to eventually returning to the field and vaulting, in a club or some other way. His eligibility to compete in the NCAA has run out.

A 2002 SHHS graduate, Burnett started college at Linn-Benton Community College and dual-enrolled at Oregon State University. He transferred to Lane Community College in January 2004 till the end of the year, pole vaulting in the spring.

He transferred to the University of Oregon the next school year and continued to pole vault. In January, he transferred to Idaho State.

He still holds the Lane Community College record for pole vaulting at 16 feet 5 inches.

At SHHS, he wrestled and played soccer four years. He was in track for four years but only vaulted for three. He ran cross-country while playing soccer his senior year.

Burnett was the winner of the first Norm Davis Memorial Scholarship award. As a sophomore, he finished eighth at districts in the pole vault. He finished third his junior year and second his senior year. He finished seventh at state his senior year.

In wrestling, he finished third in districts his junior year and qualified for state. As a senior he finished fourth in districts.