

# Fryer is kicking up a storm again

*The Neshaminy senior made an inspiring return from a terrible injury.*

By Rick O'Brien  
INQUIRER SUBURBAN STAFF

The injury was of the ghastly, not-for-the-squeamish variety.

The play, planned as just another routine punt in a junior varsity football game of no real significance, is now forever etched in the minds of Neshaminy's Rob Fryer and those who watched Fryer suffer what appeared to be a career-ending injury.

As injuries go, few are more freakish than the one Fryer, then a junior, incurred while attempting a punt against Pennsbury on Nov. 7, 1998.

While Fryer followed through on the punt, his kicking leg got caught underneath the loose, practice-style jersey of a charging Pennsbury player.

"My cleat got stuck under his uniform," Fryer recalled, "and he continued on with the play and kept running. He spun me around pretty good. When my leg finally got free, I hit the ground. I immediately felt a lot of pain in my leg. I knew I was hurt pretty badly."

Mark Schmidt, Neshaminy's varsity coach, was at the JV game that Saturday. With Fryer handling the placekicking duties, the Redskins had bowed to visiting Pennsbury in triple overtime the night before at Harry E. Franks Stadium.

"At first, it looked like Rob had just gotten turned around by the Pennsbury kid," Schmidt said. "But what happened was that his leg got caught under the kid's jersey. And then the kid continued one way, and Rob's leg went the other way."

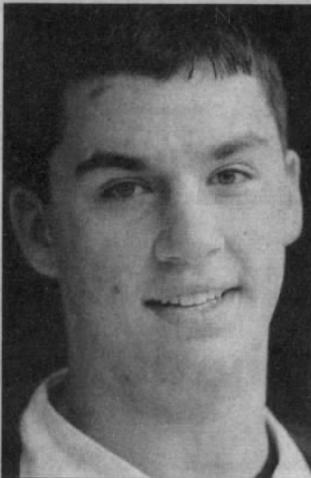
Schmidt and a team trainer hurried onto the field to assess Fryer's injury.

"He was really scared, was obviously in a lot of pain," the coach said. Fryer had to be helped off the field, and he was taken to the emergency room at St. Mary's Medical Center in Langhorne.

"I knew it wasn't good," the senior said, "but I didn't really know the extent of the injury until two days later."

An MRI revealed that Fryer had torn the anterior cruciate and lateral collateral ligaments in his right knee. The collision also severely damaged the medial collateral ligament.

Nearly three weeks later, on the day be-



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fore Thanksgiving, Fryer underwent surgery at Graduate Hospital in Philadelphia. The seven-hour operation, in which ligaments from cadavers were screwed into the knee, was performed by Vincent J. DeStefano, the former team physician for the Philadelphia Eagles.

The Langhorne resident spent the next month resting at home and did not return to school until the first week of January, after the holiday break.

"It wasn't that bad," Fryer said of the extended vacation. "My friends were over the house all the time."

Fryer, who showed up at school using crutches and wearing a hinge brace that stretched from his shin to the top of his thigh, said he didn't give serious thought to a return to football until he began rehabilitation in the middle of January.

"For a couple of months there, I was just worried about being able to walk again," he

said. "That was my main goal. But I guess, deep down, I was always hoping that I would be able to kick again."

Fryer went to physical therapy three days a week, from January to June, at Comprehensive Sports Care Specialists in Bensalem. He did plenty of stretching and a variety of exercises to regain the strength in the injured knee.

"The people there really pushed me, which was something I needed, and they actually made it kind of fun," he said. "I have to give them a lot of credit for helping me play again."

Schmidt said Fryer's return was a source of inspiration for his teammates.

"I think he set a good example for the other guys, particularly in the way he fought his way back, never gave up," the coach said.

The 6-foot-1, 200-pound Fryer, who gave up playing soccer while in middle school and turned to football as a freshman at Neshaminy, has booted two field goals and five extra points for the 2-0 Redskins. He said his kicking leg "is pretty close to full strength. It feels very good."

In Neshaminy's 37-13 season-opening win over Allentown's Dieruff High, Fryer kicked a 21-yard field goal and was 4 for 5 on extra-point tries. He averaged 36.7 yards on three punts. In last week's 32-7 romp over Suburban One League National Conference rival Central Bucks East, he drilled a 37-yard field goal, made good on 1 of 3 PATs, and punted one time for 36 yards.

"He's a big weapon for us," Schmidt said. "When we get anywhere inside the 25-yard line, we definitely feel we can go to him. And it seems like he's getting stronger every week, which could be a big plus for us."

Fryer might end up being the difference tomorrow, when Neshaminy travels to Council Rock for a showdown of unbeaten squads. The senior no doubt would relish the chance to beat the Indians with a last-second field goal.

But considering last year's nightmarish injury, he will be happy just putting on his No. 99 jersey and kicking an extra point or two.