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Sep. 6

Numbness, a five-inch needle and days of treatment: What Travis Frederick has dealt with since Guillain-Barre diagnosis

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ASHLEY LANDIS/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

DALLAS COWBOYS CENTER TRAVIS FREDERICK (72) STANDS ON THE SIDELINE DURING THE FIRST QUARTER OF AN NFL PRESEASON GAME BETWEEN THE DALLAS COWBOYS AND THE ARIZONA CARDINALS ON SUNDAY, AUGUST 26, 2018 AT AT&T STADIUM IN ARLINGTON, TEXAS. (ASHLEY LANDIS/THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS)

By [David Moore \(/author/david-moore/\)](/author/david-moore/), Staff Writer

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FRISCO -- Travis Frederick is weak. Both hands and feet are numb.

The sensation is constant.

The father of two doesn't feel like himself. But knowing how insidious and debilitating Guillain-Barre syndrome can be, Frederick is thankful. He can walk. He can breathe without assistance. He can lift his son, Oliver, and hug his daughter, Kensington.

The worst is behind the Cowboys Pro Bowl center. That includes the evening a doctor plunged a needle into his spine on four separate times before finding one the proper size for the procedure.

It was 5 inches.

Frederick finds comfort in knowing what lies ahead. What he doesn't know is how long it will take him to return to the sport he loves.

"I have no idea at this point," Frederick said Thursday afternoon, speaking publicly for the first time since receiving his diagnosis. "I wish I was lying to you by telling you that.

"I have some of the best doctors in the business working on this, and they can't even begin to predict how this is going to work. It really is a week-by-week thing. We're going to see how the improvement continues and hopefully I'll get back there as soon as I can."

The diagnosis

There was a tingling in Frederick's feet and hands during training camp in Oxnard. The numbness migrated into one of his arms and then the other.

All signs pointed to a stinger. An MRI showed that wasn't the case.

Dr. Robert Watkins, a board certified orthopedic spine surgeon a short drive down Highway 101 from the Cowboys camp in Southern California, confirmed the player wasn't dealing with a spine issue. Dr. Andrew Dossett, the spine consultant for the Cowboys, concurred.

Good news? Not really.

"There was certainly some confusion when we found out it wasn't the spine," Frederick said. "When it continued and I started seeing other doctors, they said, 'Listen, your neck is good. It's stable. You don't have any issues. That led me to the question of what is the issue then? Where is the problem?"

"That's when we started working through it."

Frederick met with a neurologist in Dallas on Aug. 20. Once the session was over he called his wife, Kaylee, and asked her to meet him at the hospital.

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Kaylee had just enough time to Google Guillain-Barre syndrome and it scared her. How could it not?

Doctors believe Frederick has an acute version of the auto immune disease that is monophasic. That means once the disorder is treated and he's healthy, the risk of contracting it again is exceedingly low.

That evening a doctor performed a spinal tap, plunging a 31/2-inch needle into his spine three times. It turns out the needle wasn't big enough.

Brandon George (/author/brandon-george)

Jason Garrett explains why Cowboys have decided to keep Travis Frederick on the active roster for now

A 5-inch needle, on the fourth try, worked.

Frederick began intravenous immunoglobulin therapy to boost his immune system the next morning. How much a patient receives depends on his size.

The center weighs 320 pounds, at least he did before this began. One of his five days of treatment lasted seven hours.

"There are a lot of different levels of this," Frederick said. "Mine was a very slow-moving case to start and sort of ramping up there at the end.

"In its slow-moving process, I caught it early and by catching it early we cut off what would be the bottom end of this -- paralysis and trouble with breathing and body control."



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What lies ahead

Frederick feels better now than he did at his worst. But he's in the early stages of his road back and has been told once he does make a big jump, the recovery will likely slow again.

The 27-year-old would be back at work if he had a desk job. What Frederick does for the Cowboys is a little more demanding physically.

A man accustomed to imposing his will on opponents is now reduced to accepting what he can tolerate.

"It's difficult for me personally," Frederick said. "For a lot of guys in this locker room, you try to push through things. When you're injured, you try and get past it.

"This is something I can't just will my way through. It's a matter of the nerves not conducting properly and not working correctly. It's going to require some patience and some great work from our rehab staff and our strength staff to be able to just continue push forward and take what my body gives me so I can continue to improve."

Frederick did circuit training last week to get his body acclimated to movement again. He's been cleared to do some free weights this week. He will miss the first game of his six-year NFL career Sunday -- he missed only one game in college -- but will accompany the team to Carolina for the regular season opener.

The support Frederick has received these last 21/2 weeks is overwhelming. He's not thought of retirement once.

"That's not been anything that's crossed my mind, because right now my focus is getting back to being here and being able to play again," Frederick said. "It's a matter of time for that to happen, and unfortunately, I don't know what that time is.

"I think as long as I continue to keep my eyes forward and continue to work toward that, we're going to be in good shape."

Catch David Moore on The Ticket (KTCK-AM 1310 and 96.7 FM) with The Musers at 9:35 a.m. every Monday, Wednesday and Friday and The Hardline at 4:15 p.m. every Tuesday and Friday during the regular season.

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