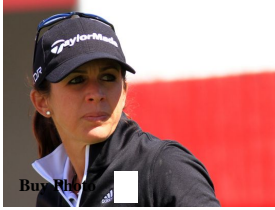


Palm Desert's Nicole Castrale has back surgery



Larry Bohannon, The Desert Sun 12:01 p.m. PST November 23, 2015



(Photo: Crystal Chatham/The Desert Sun)

Another year, another surgery for desert golfer and LPGA winner Nicole Castrale. Only this time, Castrale knows the surgery could have long-term implications for her career.

Castrale, the former Palm Desert High School and USC player who has played on two U.S. Solheim Cup teams, had back surgery last week in Marina Del Rey. The results of that surgery may not be completely known for a while, but Castrale is taking her rehabilitation slow and pondering her options.

"I have a lot of decisions to make in the next few months in rehab process," Castrale said Monday, six days after having a laminotomy on the L3-L4 joint in her spine. "We have a team of doctors around me both for my golf and my overall well-being."

Castrale, 36, has been plagued by health issues throughout her career dating back to her days at USC. She has had two surgeries on her left shoulder, two on her right shoulder and one major surgery on her hip. Now comes the back issues based on problems that date back to when she herniated a disc when she was a 19-year-old sophomore at USC.

Last week's surgery was expected to remove herniated disc materials from Castrale's back in a procedure known as a microdiscectomy, the same type of surgery that Tiger Woods recently had. But when surgeons began the procedure, they found Castrale's L3-L4 joint was too degenerative and too calcified to do the microdiscectomy, Castrale said.

Instead, the surgeons performed a laminotomy, removing some of the disc material and some ligaments in an arthroscopic procedure to relieve pressure and pain in the area. Dr. Robert Watkins III of Marina Del Rey, who has done surgeries on athletes like football star Rob Gronkowski, performed the surgery.

Castrale joked that the recovery time from the back surgery has been the worst of any surgery she's had.

"And I've had a lot of experience in that," she said.

In addition to having the back conditions since her college days, Castrale also tore the annular lining of the disc in the area of the herniation from college. That injury happened just before the Women's British Open in 2014. Castrale missed the rest of the 2014 season and played just four events early in the 2015 season before taking the rest of the season off with back issues.

For now, Castrale says she has no real timetable for returning to her playing career, even though as recently as a few weeks ago she was planning to be back on the LPGA by January. But she already knows she will continue to do some work for Golf Channel in 2016. She has been doing some work for the all-golf network both in studio in Orlando, Fla. and most recently as an on-course reporter during the LPGA's Lorena Ochoa Invitational in Mexico two weeks ago.

"I have a great opportunity with Golf Channel with on-course and studio work," Castrale said.

Castrale won the 2007 Ginn Tribute hosted by Annika in a playoff over Ochoa, then the No. 1 player in the world. She also played on the 2007 and 2009 U.S. Solheim Cup teams and has earned \$2,564,194 in a career that started in 2002.

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