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Rivers becomes first client at D1

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When Philip Rivers invested in the D1 sports training facility, he did so thinking of himself as an owner, not a customer.

But, alas, here he is on a sunny afternoon, pedaling a stationary bicycle, wearing a San Diego Chargers T-shirt and a caterpillar of a fresh scar on his right knee.

"It's kind of unique," he says. "I didn't realize I would be the first rehab patient at the place. I guess that's pretty cool, too."

Rivers, who will participate in the grand opening of the D1 facility on Bailey Cove Road Thursday night, is in rehab after surgery seven weeks ago to repair the anterior cruciate ligament. The Chargers' quarterback injured the knee in San Diego's AFC playoff game at Indianapolis on Jan. 13.

It remains a "your-guess-is-as-good-as-his" mystery as to what play caused the injury. His knees made some Rice Krispies sounds earlier in the game, and even felt a tug in his calf. But Rivers passed all the preliminary tests on the sidelines that would have revealed an injury. Then, on a touchdown pass to Darren Sproles on the last play of the third quarter, when he jumped a tad to make the pass, it all went kaploolie.

Despite the torn ACL, he started the next week in the Chargers' AFC Championship Game loss to New England.

"The thing for me is having to be patient," Rivers says, churning away on the bike. "I'm ahead of the game, barring some crazy setback. ... Everybody's told me it's not the surgery and how it went. It's what are you going to do in rehab. The guys who go through the motions, it's going to be six months. The guys who go hard and get after it, they don't miss a beat."

Such is the progress that Rivers was in rehab even before he awoke from surgery. The doctors placed him in a machine that was flexing his knee at 60 degrees as he was coming to. That's a far cry from the immobilization that used to accompany ACL operation. In the 1970s, Rivers' father Steve had ACL surgery that left him in a thigh-to-toe cast and a horseshoe scar.

Rivers, the Decatur native and former Athens High quarterback, is back home through Easter with wife Tiffany, daughters Halle, Caroline and Grace and the newest member of the family, son Philip Gunner Rivers, born in February.

No truth to the rumor Gunner, as they'll call him, already has a Nerf football in the crib.

Rivers, a backup his first two pro seasons before earning Pro Bowl selection after the 2006 season, had some early struggles in 2007. They mirrored that of the whole team, adjusting to new head coach Norv Turner. They were 5-5 in mid-November.

Then, on Nov. 25, Rivers threw three TD passes to beat Baltimore. Two weeks later, he led a 14-point comeback at Tennessee. The Chargers finished the regular season on a six-game win streak, and he

finished the season with 21 touchdown passes (but 15 interceptions) and 3,152 passing yards.

"Most importantly is the way you finish, that you're in the hunt at the end," he says. "The last six games, I played my best."

The Chargers knocked off the Titans in the first round of the playoffs, then stormed into Indianapolis to upset the defending champs, before falling to the Patriots.

The last few weeks of the season, Rivers found himself undergoing surgery from various media critics. The TV networks zoomed in for a number of intrusive and uncomfortable moments when he was jawing with opposing players.

Nothing was ever said, he stresses, that "I'd be ashamed of if my mom heard me or Tiffany heard me."

Face first on a workout table, getting his leg stretched, Rivers puts it very simply: "Let's just say I like to win and I like to have fun."

The first moment was a good-natured exchange with a Denver linebacker that was perceived as a blast at Broncos' quarterback Jay Cutler. Another, which Rivers now regrets as a losing battle, was against some woofing Colts' fans.

Another incident took place late in a game in Nashville. Running back LaDainian Tomlinson was on the bench, chatting with another teammate, as Rivers came over and sat down. Tomlinson immediately stood up, which the commentators took as a rift between Rivers and Tomlinson. In fact, Tomlinson hadn't even seen Rivers.

"I told him, so what if he'd gotten up" on purpose, Rivers laughs. "I had just thrown a pick. I'd have probably gotten up and left myself."

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