

Script – Broadcast – Treating the heart of an athlete

INTRO

Bronny James was gearing up last summer for his freshman year of basketball at the University of Southern California, when he received the scare of his life.

In July 2023, James, the son of NBA great LeBron James, suffered cardiac arrest and collapsed during a team workout. The younger James was hospitalized for three days and underwent a procedure to treat a congenital heart defect. James eventually returned to basketball activities.

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February is American Heart Month – a time to bring to light conditions such as the one James experienced that may help other people going through similar circumstances.

Natasha Noel, MD, a pediatric cardiologist with OSF HealthCare Cardiovascular Institute, says congenital heart defects, such as the one James had treated, are structural heart issues that typically develop during pregnancy and go undetected. She adds that 1% (40,000) of all babies are born with a heart defect every year in the U.S.

(((SOT)))

Dr. Natasha Noel, pediatric cardiologist, OSF HealthCare Cardiovascular Institute

"We do see that if there is a family history of congenital heart disease, either parent or sibling, the next child could be more at risk for congenital heart defects," Dr. Noel says. "And then other conditions, for example, smoking during pregnancy, maternal diabetes or use of other medications during pregnancy can lead to congenital heart defects." (:24)

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Treatment depends on the patient and the heart defect. According to the American Heart Association, many young adults who have a minor cardiac defect, and have had a good result after surgery, can participate in most activities.

Some participants could have restrictions including those with pacemakers or implantable cardioverter defibrillators (ICDs) or those who are taking anticoagulants to decrease blood clotting. Dr. Noel says to always check with your physician before taking on any physical activity or sports participation.

Dr. Noel adds that thanks to advances, medical experts have a better understanding of congenital heart defects. Not every athlete needs to give up participation – even if they have experienced a previous issue. She also stresses the importance of learning CPR and working with schools and coaches to always have an automated external defibrillator (AED) available.