

Rushes Minus Risha

Virus Will Sideline Dartmouth's Top RB for the Season

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Hanover --- Tailback Pat Risha, expected to be the main ballcarrier for the Dartmouth football team this fall, will miss the entire season after being diagnosed this summer with a rare and dangerous medical condition.

"It was a freak thing, a virus, they think, attacked his heart." Big Green coach John Lyons said yesterday. "They did every test available and found his heart was only 40 percent capacity. But they've stopped everything. He's on medication and is doing well with a physical therapy program."

Risha is expected to make a complete recovery and resume his football career next year.

"The hope right now is he'll be OK for spring practice," Lyons said. "We're going to miss him this season, but we're just glad they found it and were able to take care of it."

Risha, a 5-foot-10, 205 pound sophomore from McKeesport, Pa., fell sick between winter and spring terms last year and admitted to Lyons after the fact that he didn't feel up to speed during drills.

"He was able to make it through, but we really don't condition hard and there isn't a lot of heavy running in the spring," Lyons explained. "When he went home and started following our conditioning program he was really having trouble catching his breath. And he was having some pain around his heart."

Risha conferred with his father, a former high school coach. The elder Risha quickly got in touch with Freddie H. Fu, a Dartmouth College and Dartmouth Medical School graduate who heads up the Center for Sports Medicine at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center.

Fu, the Pittsburgh football team physician, hooked Risha up with the city's top heart specialist, who made the diagnosis and began treatment.

"It's a tough thing for Pat, and he is really upset about it," said Lyons. "luckily, they identified what the problem was and are taking care of it. If had tried to continue working out, it could have been a lot worse."

Risha was Dartmouth's leading returning rusher after collecting 260 yards on 49 carries as a freshman. He ran 16 times for 91 yards at Holy Cross and had 13 carries for 85 yards against Cornell. His 5.3-yard average gain was among the highest in the Ivy League.

"We are going to miss Pat's abilities," said Lyons. "He showed everybody what he could do as a freshman. He's a very good football player with a great attitude and he's a very tough, hard-nosed kid. Football is very important to him."

Because it is, Risha had a difficult time accepting what the medical specialists told him.

"He kept holding out hope it would go away," said Lyons. "He didn't want to believe it. To have earned the starting position and have it taken away was devastating for him."

Dartmouth kicks off its preseason camp at week's end and Risha is back to school soon thereafter.

"It will be good for him to be back up here around his buddies," Lyons said. "He's going to meet the medical people at the hospital and continue with the same program he's following."

"He's looking at it as if he's got a serious knee injury and he's going to get better by doing what the doctors are having him do."

While Risha prepares for fall without football, Dartmouth football now has to prepare for a season without the hard-running Risha.

"It's tough, because he's one of your main guys," said Lyons. "You've been counting on him and now you don't have him, but just thank God they found it when they did."