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**“Tommy John Surgery Can Be Quite Beneficial To A Pitcher,**

**Making Him Even Better Than Before”**

According to baseball-reference.com, Tommy John surgery, more properly known as *ulnar collateral ligament reconstruction* (UCL), is a surgical operation in which a ligament in the elbow is replaced with a tendon from elsewhere in the body, often from the forearm, hamstring, or foot of the patient. The procedure was developed by Dr. Frank Jobe in 1974 for pitcher Tommy John, after whom the surgery was named. Prior to this surgery, a torn UCL or a “dead arm” was potentially career ending, but thanks to Dr. Frank Jobe, this is no longer the case. In 2012, multiple researchers at europepmc.org predicted the results from a questionnaire, produced for baseball coaches and athletes, “that the public’s perception of Tommy John surgery may be incorrect with regard to the indications, operative technique, risks, …” After their studies on this particular subject, it turns out that their hypothesis was reasonable. Tommy John surgery is a procedure with a long and difficult recovery period, but at the end of the road, it is truly worthwhile.

General perceptions of Tommy John surgery, whether it is from baseball fans or from a player himself, is that it is detrimental to a player’s career. In fact, as shown by the europepmc.org’s questionnaire, this is the prevailing view. The questionnaire recorded that only a small percentage, as few as 28% of players and 20% of coaches, believe that performance is enhanced beyond pre-injury levels. The experience of Kerry Wood is one of many that exposes the faults of the majority view.

In 1998, this Chicago Cubs’ phenome broke out onto the scene as one of a long line of Texan Flamethrowers, following in the path of the 1999 Baseball Hall of Fame inductee, Nolan Ryan. Baseball-reference.com reports that this memorable season for Kerry Wood included a 3.40 earned run average, averaged 12.6 strikeouts per 9 innings, just under 200 innings pitched, 13 wins and 6 losses, and earning the very prestigious National League Rookie of the Year Award. In other words, such a truly remarkable season is analogous to an eight year old violinist playing Vivaldi’s Four Seasons with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. Following this extraordinary season, Wood was preparing to enter his first full season as a major leaguer. Instead of throwing 96 miles per hour, however, Wood was sitting on Dr. James Andrews’s operation table about to undergo Tommy John surgery for a torn UCL. Prior to his debut in Major League Baseball, Wood was often throwing two ends of a double-header multiple times in a season. As explained by Will Carrol in his book *Saving The Pitcher* (15) such long-term overuse of Kerry Wood’s throwing arm directly contributed to his condition necessitating Tommy John surgery.

Kerry Wood’s surgery lasted only two hours, but required nearly 18 months of recovery and rehabilitation. A few years following the surgery, in 2003, Wood returned to his dominant form, recording a 3.20 earned run average, a personal best in strikeouts, over 200 innings pitched, 14 wins, and a lifetime achievement in representing the National League at the All-Star game hosted at Chicago’s U.S. Cellular Field. Simply put, he exceeded all misguided expectations of mediocrity after Tommy John surgery. In other words, at this point in his career, he blossomed from playing Vivaldi’s Four Seasons with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, to playing Beethoven’s Symphony No. 3 in E Flat Major, Op. 55 with the New York Philharmonic. Wood’s experience demonstrates that Tommy John surgery for a UCL tear in a pitcher’s throwing arm, which has become one of the most prominent and severe injuries in modern-day baseball, can result in enhanced performance.

Other beneficial results can accompany Tommy John surgery. For instance, according to insidescience.com, numerous studies have shown that pitchers win more games, it lowers the hits and walks per innings pitched, and it lowers a pitcher’s earned run average. During an interview for foxnews.com, Dr. Christopher Ahmad, an associate professor of orthopedic surgery at Columbia University and head team physician for the New York Yankees, stated “If you are a developing athlete at 16, you’re going to get batter and be a better athlete at 19,” with Tommy John surgery. Finally, according to the WashingtonPost.com, 87% of Tommy John recipients have a successful return to the game of baseball.

On the other hand, there are examples of players who have not enjoyed the same success as Kerry Wood, Adam Wainwright, Jordan Zimmermann, and Pittsburgh’s own A.J. Burnett. Less familiar players given their career ending injuries, Ambiorix Burgos, Anthony Reyes, Macay McBride, and Bill Simas, never threw another pitch at their pre-injury, pre-surgery levels, according to hardballtimes.com. In addition, although the number of high school pitchers is much greater than that of professional pitchers, a lower number of them have as successful an outcome from Tommy John surgery. This fact is attributed to their growing bodies which are not yet fully mature.

To conclude, Tommy John surgery is not to be taken lightly, and the surgery provides no guarantee of enhanced performance. But the chances are good that an elite-level athlete can recover and return from a UCL tear even better than before. Kerry Wood, Adam Wainwright, Jordan Zimmermann, and Pittsburgh’s own A.J. Burnett – with an extraordinary 1.38 earned run average – all demonstrate that the surgery can positively and extensively impact an already outstanding career.