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PENDLETON

Surgery frees pitcher from constant pain

Dad's Internet research leads to help for teen who suffered over 5 years with rare disorder.

 By **Nat Newell**
nat.newell@indystar.com
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It wasn't pain.

This was Pain -- capital P, proper noun -- the hurt so constant it became part of Shay Hoskins. The dull ache deep in the Pendleton Heights High School pitcher's right hip would reach down her leg with every movement until it stuck like a knife in the back of her knee. Pain was a possessive monster, intent on keeping her to itself.

"Sitting for a long time, walking for a long time . . . anything was real painful," Hoskins said. "Being a teenage girl and going through middle school and high school with it . . . all the tears . . . all the long nights crying because it hurt . . . my parents wanting to help, and there was nothing they could do . . ."

"I limited myself from doing everything. These are the times of your life you're going to remember. I feel like I lost a lot."

She is pain-free for the first time in more than five years. Hoskins can roller skate, bowl and, most importantly, the senior will be healthy when she leads sixth-ranked Pendleton Heights into the Hamilton Heights Sectional at 5 p.m. Monday vs. New Castle.

Hoskins was injured in September 1998 after falling off a trampoline and landing on her back at a birthday party. The accident shifted Hoskins' sciatic nerve so the piriformis muscle, near the pelvis, pinched the nerve against bone when she moved her leg or sat for more than an hour.

Her father, Steve, found an article on piriformis syndrome that matched her symptoms. When none of the specialists Shay Hoskins saw took the information seriously, he started researching the condition on the Internet and found Dr. Aaron Filler and the Institute for Nerve Medicine in Santa Monica, Calif.



Pendleton Heights' Shay Hoskins gave up volleyball and basketball because of her constant pain. She was hurt in September 1998 when she fell off a trampoline. -- Rich Miller / The Star

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"Most doctors, when they see patients such as Shay, will check for the usual findings that go with (disc problems) and when they don't find them, instead of considering piriformis syndrome, they'll simply say there's nothing wrong with you," Filler said. "People have lost medical benefits because doctors don't believe them."

The Hoskinses flew to California in October. Shay underwent tests and returned in December for surgery. The piriformis muscle was cut loose and a sliver removed so it wouldn't grow back and entangle the sciatic nerve.

"(After Dr. Filler's surgery) it's like I'm a new person," said Hoskins. "I can run. Everybody hates running, but it's frustrating when you have to watch your teammates run around the park. Now I'm out there heaving and catching my breath. It's awesome."

Hoskins went through the same battery of tests three times for different doctors, enduring physical therapy, chiropractors, massage therapy, exploratory and outpatient surgeries and bone scans. She went through so many surgical procedures -- 16 -- she developed a resistance to the anesthesia and woke up while receiving injections of steroids.

Good Shepherd Community Church took two collections to help offset the costs of the trips to California, and Steve Hoskins' grandmother loaned the family money, but the pursuit of a cure has still been a financial burden. Steve Hoskins doesn't care.

"We'll be dealing with it for quite a while, but it was all worth it," he said. "Three months after the surgery, I got a voice mail from her saying she got to pitch at full speed in practice. I couldn't understand all of what she was saying because she was so excited and talking so fast, but I heard, 'It's awesome. I don't feel any pain at all.'

"I started crying right there in the car."

Pitching was the only thing pain couldn't take from Hoskins. She could have helped Pendleton Heights with her bat but couldn't even take batting practice and wasn't allowed to run.

She had to give up volleyball and basketball, and the first doctor she saw said she couldn't play softball. But she wasn't coming off the mound.

"Many times she'd pitch and would be crying," Steve Hoskins said. "After the game, she'd be so sore she couldn't walk."

Hoskins pitched for travel teams since she was 8, winning two state titles. She appeared in the state championship game for Pendleton Heights as a freshman and became the program's No. 1 starter the next season.

Hoskins' rehabilitation kept her off the mound until March, months when most pitchers are working out. She also battled a thumb injury this year but has a 7-3 record and 1.19 ERA heading into the postseason.

"If you've never had back problems, you don't understand," coach Scott Hall said. "To be able to play at the level she did . . . you can't take that away from her. I'm glad to say I coached Shay Hoskins."

Call Star reporter Nat Newell at (317) 444-2610.

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