Breaking Down New York Mets Ace Matt Harvey's Torn Elbow Ligament

Howie Rumberg, AP Sports Writer

Matt Harvey has a partially torn ligament in his right elbow, a potentially devastating injury for the pitcher that had given the foundering New York Mets reason to be hopeful about their future.

For now, the 24-year-old Harvey and the Mets hope that he will be able to avoid reconstruction surgery on the ulnar collateral ligament. A full prognosis will not be made until swelling in the elbow goes down in about two weeks.
"It was tough. Obviously it was the last thing I was expecting when I went this

morning," Harvey said Monday. "I am going to do everything I can to avoid surgery."

The National League's All-Star game starter on his home field this July, Harvey has been experiencing forearm tenderness for a month or two but could not pinpoint exactly when it began. The discomfort increased during his start Saturday against the Detroit Tigers, when he allowed a career-high 13 hits.

Harvey admitted he was tired against the Tigers, the 26th start of his first full season in the major leagues. Manager Terry Collins said he noticed Harvey's pitches weren't as crisp, a sign of fatigue.

But Collins didn't know Harvey had any issues with his forearm until Sunday and the ace went for an MRI at the Hospital for Special Surgery a day later.

"Nothing is shooting in my elbow at all. That's not the issue," Harvey said. "When I heard the news, I was pretty shocked. I'm still very optimistic."

Harvey wasn't the only one in the Mets organization stunned by the news.

"This was a surprise to all of us," general manager Sandy Alderson said. "Forearm pain can foretell problems with the elbow, but in this particular circumstance there had been no indications of that."

Harvey wasn't immediately placed on the disabled list. Carlos Torres will take his spot in the rotation and face the Phillies on Thursday.

Torres got two outs on Monday night in the Mets' 2-1 loss to Philadelphia that dropped New York to 58-71.

The No. 7 pick of the 2010 draft, Harvey is 9-5 with a 2.27 ERA. He has a league-leading 191 strikeouts in 178 1-3 innings pitched and was a top candidate for the NL Cy Young Award.

"It put everybody down," catcher Travis d'Arnaud said. "When we heard the news everybody was just speechless. I just feel terrible, man."

The Mets were working on limiting Harvey's innings to a little more than 200 this season. Alderson said there is no real scientific basis for managing young pitchers' careers.

"These innings limits are not a guarantee of anything. They're certainly not based on any science," Alderson said. "This is a kind of progressive injury that isn't a function of, we don't believe in this case a specific incident or quote overuse. It's an anatomical fact that these things happen."

The blow is particularly tough for an organization that has not been to the playoffs since 2006, and hasn't had a winning season in its new ballpark that opened in '09.

But Harvey was the first of several top young pitchers who were supposed to help

lead New York back to the postseason, and Mets captain David Wright cited the talent in the minor leagues as one of the reasons he signed a big contract to remain in New York last winter.

One of those rising stars, Zack Wheeler, started for the Mets on Monday and took the loss.

Wheeler pitched impressively into the seventh inning, giving up two runs and five hits. But Collins lifted him with two outs even though Wheeler was about to face Phillies lefty Cliff Lee.

"We said before the game that 105 was the limit," Collins said. "Obviously, after what happened earlier today we're sticking to it."

Harvey made a marvelous big league debut last season, striking out 11 in 5 2-3 innings against the Diamondbacks and has been even more dominant this season.

Big like classic power pitchers Nolan Ryan and Roger Clemens, with a fastball that regularly reaches 98 mph, Harvey flirted with no-hitters several times this season. The excitement at Citi Field every time he pitched was not present on most other nights, and the Mets took to calling his starts "Harvey Day."

"This is a great loss for the Mets. Matt Harvey has given us a lot of hope this year for the future. He's been our shining star this year," said David Greenfield of Fairlawn, N.J., a self-professed Mets fan since their first season of 1962. "He's a class guy, and Mets fans need something to hang our hats on."

The news about Harvey comes just days after the same doctor, David Altchek, recommended Tommy John Surgery for teammate Jeremy Hefner.

Also, right-hander Jenrry Mejia returned from elbow-reconstruction surgery last September. After making just five starts this year, he went back on the DL and is likely going to have an operation to remove bone spurs from the elbow. Two-time Cy Young Award winner Johan Santana had his second shoulder surgery and is out for the season.

While Harvey hopes to avoid surgery by strengthening the muscles in the shoulder and arm, Alderson was a bit more realistic in discussing the elbow. He said this type of injury can worsen over time and that even if the ace with a Russian supermodel for a girlfriend can keep from having an operation now, he may need it in several years.

Tommy John surgery has become a fairly common procedure for pitchers. Recovery time usually takes at least a year, and many have made successful returns. Washington Nationals ace Stephen Strasburg had the operation after a tantalizing debut. His teammate Jordan Zimmermann, an All-Star this year, also made a successful return.

Source URL (retrieved on *03/06/2014 - 11:41pm*):
http://www.surgicalproductsmag.com/news/2013/08/breaking-down-new-york-mets-ace-matt-harveys-torn-elbow-ligament