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## The road back

Tuesday, June 11, 2013

Robert Cupples, longtime educator as well as sports official, continues to improve after suffering two strokes

During the course of his 40-year career as an educator as well as the many years spent as an official for sporting events, Robert Cupples enjoyed his life to the fullest while watching youngsters learn and enjoy themselves both in the classroom as well as on the field of play.

All that changed on Oct. 15 when Cupples suffered not one, but two massive strokes in a matter of several hours.

The first came at Dyersburg Intermediate School and the second occurred en route to the hospital in Jackson. During the initial stroke, Cupples excused himself and went to the restroom believing he was experiencing a bad sinus headache.

"I made it to the bathroom and slid down the wall and at some point I blacked out," said Cupples. "I was there for several hours. It wasn't anybody's fault that I was there for so long, that's just the way it played out."

His absence may have gone on longer if not for a daily tradition of calling his wife Tracy, both at 10:30 in the morning as well as 1:30 in the afternoon. When the morning call wasn't made, Tracy became a little antsy and decided to call Robert.

"I called and left him a message and something told me to call right back," said Tracy Cupples. "About 1 p.m. I called again because it was so out of character for him to not call."

Still unable to reach her husband, Tracy called DIS and asked to speak to him, a decision that may have saved his life. The school too had been missing Robert and after a search he was found in the restroom after 5 1/2 hours without anyone knowing his whereabouts.

Initially transported to Dyersburg Regional Medical Center, Cupples had a CT scan that showed he had suffered a massive stroke. Once he arrived at the hospital in Jackson, a second CT scan revealed a second stroke.

At this point, things didn't look well for Cupples. He was transported to Vanderbilt where he stayed in intensive care for 10 days. Cupples had a blockage in his carotid artery and two active blood clots above the blockage.

The family prepared for the worst.

"They really didn't think he would make it because of the blood clots," added Tracy. "They told us any day he improved any at all and didn't get worse was a good day."

Doctors, going against protocol and stepping outside the box, then started Cupples on heparin. The move dissolved the blood clots after 10 days at Vanderbilt and possibly saved his life, allowing a stint to be placed in the carotid artery.

Cupples, paralyzed on his left side, left Vanderbilt and was relocated to Cane Creek in Martin to begin rehabilitation.

On May 4, Cupples traveled to Florida to receive a shot of Enbrel, medicine usually used to treat those with rheumatoid arthritis. The drug is approved by the FDA, but not the procedure. The cost of the shot combined with travel costs topped \$10,000, but was well worth it when Cupples began to feel movement on the left side of his body.

Since receiving the shot, Cupples has been scheduled for therapy at Sports Plus three days a week. In typical Cupples fashion, with his wife by his side, he goes five days a week.

"It's nonstop but I'm going to get back to where I was before this happened, or at least I sure hope to and I'm going to do everything I can to make it happen," he said.

Cupples hopes to return to Florida once more before the start of school in August, something he believes will help his chances of returning to DIS for the 2013-14 school year.



Robert Cupples (l) stands with one of his doctors during a recent medical visit to Florida.

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Though he knows there's a chance he will not regain full movement on his left side, Cupples' goal is to do so. His plans are to return to his position at DIS as assistant principal as well as roam the sidelines as a supervisor of officials, something that keeps him going day after day.

"I do want to go back to school for my 41st year and I really miss football," said Cupples. "I need those kids. When you've done this as long as I have it's in your blood and I miss it pretty bad."

While the Cupples family is thankful for the prayers and support they've received throughout the journey, he saved his biggest thanks for the Dyersburg City School system.

"The entire school system has been so good to us throughout this whole thing and I want them to know how much I appreciate their support," added Cupples. "It means so much and I'm blessed to work for such good people."


While many have stepped up already to show their support for Cupples, there is a planned alumni tournament to be held at DCHS on Saturday, June 15 beginning at 11 a.m.

The tournament will involve two teams from DCHS, a team from Covington and one from Obion County. There will be four games total and the cost to attend the fundraiser for Cupples is just \$10. All proceeds raised will go toward the cost of Cupples returning to Florida for another 'super' shot.

Those that believed Cupples would never walk again would be amazed to see him today. Though using a cane, he can walk just fine and continues to improve on a daily basis. A walking miracle yes, and though the road ahead will certainly have its bumps, with the determination Cupples possesses his future is as bright as the children's faces he longs to be around in the coming months, both in the classroom as well as on the field.

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Robert Couples is a great man with much willpower. He has his family and friends by his side. There is no doubt he will be back!

God bless you, our thoughts and prayers are with you!

-- Posted by [sheepdog](#) on Sat, Jun 15, 2013, at 6:31 AM

Mr Couples was a teacher for the Migrant School program way back when I was young :) I have prayed for him often. SO thankful to see such a good report! He is a great teacher! He loves children and is an awesome encourager. Blessings to you Mr Cupples to get all your mobility back and to return to your job at the school. Paula Smith Roper

-- Posted by [ropers4](#) on Fri, Jun 28, 2013, at 9:13 AM

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