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Article published November 16, 2010 09:16AM

Smith recovering after breaking neck at Rugby Classic::

By Josh Ball

Australian coach Damian Smith is recovering in a Boston hospital after breaking his neck during last week's World Rugby Classic.

Smith was airlifted to New England Baptist Hospital on Friday morning after dislocating and fracturing the C4 and C5 vertebrae in his spinal column in an accident.

Fortunately there was no damage to the spinal cord, no paralysis, and he was successfully operated on by Dr Stephen Parizan soon after arriving in the US.

The former Australia international, whose wife, Bronwyn, has flown to be by his bedside, will now recuperate in Boston before being allowed to fly home some time in the next three weeks.

"Damian rang me from hospital yesterday, he was in great spirits and over the moon that everything went well," said team manager Brad Bishop. "They operated on him with great success."

Having been injured in the early hours of Friday morning, Smith was rushed to King Edward VII Memorial Hospital where he was assessed by Dr Will Peckett before being sent out on Air Ambulance for Boston.

A CT scan identified that Smith had suffered a 'right C4, C5 unilateral interfacetal dislocation, a jumped-locked facet or C4 on C5, and a fracture on the C4 interior articular facet'.

Dr Parizan's operation involved going through the front of the neck and fusing the two vertebrae together in order to stabilise the region.

While Smith's injuries were serious enough, they might have been a lot worse, any dislocation or fracture of the vertebrae above C4 generally results in paralysis.

"I grew up with Damian in Australia and have known him a long time," said Bermuda resident Beau Franklin, who rushed to King Edward hospital on Friday morning. "He was very, very fortunate that one of the members of the touring party is a sports medicine doctor, and his brother, who was also touring, is medically trained as well, they stopped any further damage."

And the Australian team were full of praise for the care that Smith received throughout his ordeal.

"It's anticipated that he'll be able to fly back to Australia in the next two and a half weeks," said a team spokesman. "The staff at King Edward, the way the ambulance responded and the level and standard of care provided by the staff at the hospital, but also by Dr Peckett, was extremely high and very appreciated.

"Dr Peckett got there at 5am to see him, which is pretty impressive."

New England Baptist Hospital has a long history of treating athletes and as well as being a teaching hospital for Harvard School of Medicine and Tufts University, is also the official hospital of the Boston Celtics.
