

# BACK in the GAME

More and more athletes are returning to competitive sports after ACL injuries

By Wendy Haaf



**EVERTON WILLIAMS HAD ALWAYS WANTED** to become a professional football player. But at 24, just as he was finishing university, he tore the ACL ligament in his knee. Williams, an offensive lineman, missed training camp for Canadian Football League prospects that year, but then signed with the Hamilton Tiger-Cats, crediting early intervention, including knee reconstruction surgery, for helping him recover months ahead of schedule. “It’s like brand new,” he says.

Williams is one of about 5,000 people in Ontario who undergo ACL repair each year. Some do so because non-surgical treatments haven’t sufficiently restored normal function; others, like Williams, are athletes intent on resuming sports and want to avoid further joint damage. “Surgical intervention prevents knee buckling, and secondary damage to knee joint structures that can occur with pivoting and twisting motions associated with sport,” explains Dr. Jas Chahal, an orthopedic surgeon and Krembil Research Institute clinician scientist. He adds that people of all ages and activity levels can benefit from ACL surgery if non-operative care isn’t effective.

Currently, Dr. Chahal is investigating whether leg position during surgery affects patient outcomes. If it does, then health professionals may be able to customize the surgical and rehabilitation process to each individual. “With an appropriate treatment program including surgery and physiotherapy, athletes like Everton can recover from their injuries and continue to play competitive sports at the highest levels,” explains Dr. Chahal.

Williams is just one of many players, including Tom Brady and Kyle Lowry, who haven’t missed a step post-surgery. “I’m feeling great and looking forward to getting back in the game,” he says.