

Finding balance leads Carlson back to hope, health, happiness

BY VALERIE CUTSHALL
CONNECTION TO WEST OMAHA

Nov. 25, 2005 began like any other day for Anthony Carlson. He went to work and just happened to stop by his house.

As he bent down to pick up some trash from the floor, he felt a very intense pain in his head. This was not so normal. When he awoke he was at the kitchen table. His girlfriend found him at the table noncoherent, helped walk him to the car and then drove to the hospital.

After a short time at the hospital and a few cursory tests the hospital released him.

The next day Carlson started losing some of his motor skills and back to the hospital he went.

This time it wasn't a short visit.

After being admitted to the University of Nebraska Medical Center, Carlson learned he had experienced a stroke.

At only 29 years old and in excellent physical shape, it is hard to believe a man with such enthusiasm could lose it all. The next five days were uncertain for Carlson.

Unsure if he would ever regain the skills he previously had, he continued to undergo physical therapy to relearn the things he normally thought nothing about.

The simplest tasks such as eating or getting in and out of the bathtub became chores and things that required a lot of mental thought and

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Photo by Tony Miceli

Anthony Carlson, top, during a submission wrestling class at MidAmerica Martial Arts.

Carlson

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control. During those five days Carlson relearned to eat, walk and do the day-to-day tasks life requires.

Before the stroke Carlson was hitting the gym twice a day. Now just holding himself up and walking were daunting tasks. The dedication he learned in the gym was certainly evident when just five days after being admitted he walked out of the hospital on his own two feet.

The only diagnosis for the cause of the stroke was a hereditary condition, a narrow artery causing less blood flow to the brain. Doctors advised him to watch his diet, reduce his stress and certainly be aware of the physical activity he chooses to participate in.

Although doctors did not advise Carlson to continue with his martial arts training he feels it is safe for him to do so. He watches

the type of activity he engages in and pays special attention to avoid any physical contact to his neck and head.

"It is finding a balance between things," Carlson said. "I limit the amount of impact to my head. I have learned to defend and control my body to avoid impact there."

A year later, his life now is somewhat back to normal. Carlson tries to watch his stress levels and tries to eat a healthy diet. Oh, and there's the nonstop poking feeling he has on his brain. But above all he has regained all his motor skills.

"I am more aware now," he said. "I appreciate the training I practice and spending time with my family. I try to get everything I can out of life. It's the dedication in life that make you a champion."

For more information,
visit www.stroke.org and
www.strokeassociation.org