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An Optimistic Outlook from a Life Threatening Injury

By Molly Wells

What are your choices when you are faced with an injured horse? When you hear your horse has fractured his leg and fear sets in, what do you do? As an owner you do have choices. This is a story of an owner who chose to incorporate the best veterinary care available to him, along with correct physical therapy and rehabilitation. His choices were made from an optimistic outlook which resulted in a positive ending for his horse. Volker Brommann, a Dressage trainer in Newcastle, California, decided that he would follow the meaning of his horse's name and gave Optimist the best possible chance at recovery.

In January of 2009, Optimist fractured his front leg (the Radius bone) as a result of a blunt force from being kicked in a turnout pasture. The injury was also accompanied with an infection from the open wound that was caused from the kick. Dr. Kris Purcell of Gardnerville, Nevada, who was the primary veterinarian, quickly sent Optimist to UC Davis where they would be able to adequately address the infection and monitor him with their equipment. Optimist underwent surgery to remove the portion of bone that had been infected, therefore weakening the fracture site. Optimist spent the following 6 weeks in a sling in ICU at UC Davis. He was monitored around the clock by qualified veterinarians and technicians. He was primarily monitored by Dr. Galupo, a board certified surgeon at UC Davis who also conducted his surgery.

Volker stated, "When he was first injured his chances of survival with a fracture and infection were very slim. In the beginning it was very tough to take because hearing that your horse has a fractured leg, then being told that he had to have surgery and be in a sling, and that he only had a 50/50 chance of surviving, I couldn't believe that this was happening. I was stumped by what I was hearing, as anyone would be. The fact that Molly was there right from the beginning along with the great veterinary care, gave him a much better chance of surviving than a horse that hadn't been treated. It helped him get through the injury, even in the initial stages, which was very important".

In the past when people heard the words "fractured leg" they automatically assumed that the animal would be euthanized. In today's modern world our technology and rehabilitation procedures have tremendously advanced and grown, and that is no longer the automatic outcome for an animal. Surgical techniques have advanced and are being conducted by qualified surgeons in the veterinary world and proper rehabilitation is being applied by qualified therapists, which is also an expanding field. There are several factors that are taken into consideration when determining the prognosis and outcome for an animal that incurs this type of injury. Optimist was a candidate for surgery as well as rehabilitation.



Once Optimist was admitted to the University for intensive care, Volker asked the primary surgeons if they would allow me to conduct the rehabilitation side of his recovery. The veterinarians agreed to allow me to apply treatments for Optimist utilizing the Electro-Acuscope/Myoscope Therapy System, which is specifically calibrated for animals. This is an FDA-approved micro-current therapy system that is biofeedback modulated. These instruments input a low level of current (what our bodies produce naturally) and monitor the tissue throughout the treatments to insure that the body gets the exact amount of current needed for it to begin the work of self repair. (For more information on this therapy system please visit www.equinescence.com).

We worked together as a team between the surgeons and veterinarians, the



Volker Brommann riding Optimist following his complete recovery.

veterinary technicians, and the therapists applying the physical therapy treatments. It's extremely important to include everyone in a team effort because we would not have reached our optimal outcome if we had not worked together. The veterinarians offered their precise surgical skills and advanced medical knowledge and care. The veterinary technicians were a part of his daily care of administering his medications, cleaning his wound, changing his bandages, and monitoring him ever so closely. I constructed his physical therapy program and treatment regimen, and monitored his needs and progress from a rehabilitation standpoint. I was also assisted by a past student of mine, Corinne Davis, who was attending UC Davis at the time.

“Once we got to Davis I was impressed because Molly and her assistant were there all of the time. They spent a lot of hours with him, and even when I wasn't able to be there they were. It says a lot to Molly's dedication of treating horses. I was also very happy about the fact that Dr. Galupo and his team were open to Molly's work even with their limited knowledge of this therapy system. Dr. Galupo, who is well known and recognized for his veterinary work, was open to working

with her and willing to learn about what she did. Everyone who was involved embraced the treatments with him”, Volker stated.

Optimist underwent daily care from the veterinary staff at the University, along with 5-6 treatments per week with the Acuscope and Myoscope instruments. When a horse is injured and in a sling there can be many negative side effects that take place such as muscle atrophy, nerve damage, loss of circulation, laminitis, etc. In this case we were able to address and prevent these possible side effects, provide pain management, focus on the injury site, and also treat the referred pain and compensatory areas of the body. By applying the correct physical therapy along with excellent veterinary care, we were able to accelerate the healing process and take Optimist out of the sling in less than half of the expected time. It was decided to take him out of the sling after 6 weeks, when 13 weeks were suggested.

“When Dr. Galupo said to me that Optimist was healing very well and they normally do not see horses heal as well as he did from this type of injury, I knew I was doing the right thing for him. It really was a team effort which got Optimist through this situation successfully because everyone worked together and provided him with the best care that was available. However, I truly believe that he would not have healed the way he did, or survived this injury without the Acuscope and Molly's work”, Volker said.

Everyone gathered to watch Optimist's first steps out the stall that had kept him confined for 6 weeks. All of the staff had become fond of Optimist. “Optimist has a very large personality which helped him as well because he didn't give up either, and he adapted to the situation much better than I had anticipated”, stated Volker. He had learned how to keep himself occupied during the long days in his stall by swinging from wall to wall in his sling, playing towel games by throwing them on and off of his head, finding new areas of the sling that he could chew on, and anticipating the tasty and sloppy bran mashes at lunch time to buy more quiet time for the staff and excitement for Optimist. Although all of his activities were entertaining for some, it added stressful days to the staff as it became difficult to keep him quiet and contained. The name Optimist was known throughout the facility, and his unique nicker would welcome anyone who entered the barn. Volker's second home became UC Davis, as did mine, and Optimist had learned to adapt to an unconventional way of living through those 6 long weeks contained in his sling. Everyone held their breath as he took his first steps out of the stall, hoping for the best, and then witnessed the unthinkable. Optimist walked out of his stall comfortably, calm, and sound! There were no signs of nerve damage, muscle atrophy, laminitis, or any of the feared side effects that could have taken place over those 6 weeks. It was a special day as a sense of relief and excitement traveled through the facility, but everyone knew that we still had work ahead of us.

After his successful release from the sling Optimist was transferred to 7-C Rehab Center, a nearby lay-up facility. He received excellent care and continued to excel during his daily regimen. We continued his treatment program through his stay at the facility, as it was very important to stay consistent with our recovery work. During his initial day at the facility

he attempted to lie down and roll for the first time in almost 7 weeks. Everyone held their breath again hoping that he would be able to get up without reinjuring himself, and he did. He learned not only to adapt to the situation mentally, but began to protect himself physically. He was clever throughout the entire process, and when he layed down for the first time, he got back up without bearing weight on his left front leg. Slowly over time as he became stronger he started to use that limb more comfortably, and became more confident.

In April I received a call from Volker saying that Optimist was cleared to be walked under saddle, just 3 months after his injury. Volker's experience as a trainer helped him bring Optimist back slowly and methodically. He was conscious of the nature of his horse, and typically what horses are capable of after they've been confined for several months. He wanted to avoid any explosive moves and behavior that Optimist was capable of while he was trying to bring him back, and made sure that he controlled the environment at all times to keep him safe. Each time that Volker introduced something new or extended his exercise time, he conducted the move on the ground first and then transferred it to his back. When he was cleared to walk him under saddle, Volker hand walked him first with the saddle on for a few days, allowing Optimist to adjust to the feeling again, and then introduced his weight. By being careful and cautious of the situation, he prevented Optimist from having any explosive outbursts.

Volker was then able to incorporate some trot work a month later in May, after Dr. Galupo examined Optimist again. In June more trot work was incorporated and Optimist was able to move back home to Volker's training barn. His work excelled, and through this whole process I monitored him and kept him on a treatment program. During this transitioning period and several vet checks later Volker kept increasing his work load and exercise time. When an animal is undergoing a rehabilitation program it's very important to continue their treatments and care as they begin to increase their work and exercise to insure stability and strength with the injury site. Many people make the mistake of discontinuing the recovery process as they are cleared for more exercise. However, if you continue the care and treatments it will allow the body to accept the increased stress and continue to build and become stronger throughout this period.

Volker recalled a special moment as we talked. "I remember it clearly; it was exactly 7 months to the day from his surgery that I cantered him for the first time. January 10th he was operated on, and July 10th he took his first canter steps and it brought tears to my eyes. To think that in exactly 7 months we went from not knowing whether he would survive to taking 6-7 canter steps in my arena. It was an unbelievable feeling".

The first week of August 2009 I received the best news that I could have asked for. Volker informed me that Optimist had been cleared for full training, and not only full training, but Dr. Galupo wanted to know when his first show would be! I cried tears of joy not only for Volker, but because Optimist had successfully overcome a life threatening injury with the help of his dedicated owner. This was a prime example of what is possible when people choose to do things correctly with qualified professionals all working together in the best interest of the animal. Optimist recovered not only to have a good quality of life, but to be able to show again in his discipline.

Volker and Optimist returned to showing in Dressage, scoring highly and successfully this year. Within 6 months of Optimist returning to full training, Volker rode him in three different clinics with Olympic-level clinicians. One year from his injury Optimist received ribbons for his achievements in Dressage, scoring and showing at a higher level than before his injury took place.

"Once I was at a place where I was able to ride him again I needed to learn to not protect him from a trainer's standpoint. I had to give him a chance to rebuild his strength and allow him to train at a higher level. The veterinarians had completed their job, Molly was still keeping him healthy from a physical therapy standpoint, and now it was my turn to train him to his ability and capabilities", Volker recalled. "As long as I was on good, solid ground I knew the more I rode him and the more opportunities that I presented to him, the better chance he had of returning to a successful and competitive career".

An "optimist" is defined as one who expects a favorable outcome. Optimist has lived up to the definition of his name, and his owner allowed him to do so. Volker was faced with many choices and decisions, but he educated himself about proper physical therapy and great veterinary care. When he incorporated the two together, he gave his horse the best chances of recovery, and in the end had a favorable outcome.

Volker also added, "I believe that the Acuscope and Myoscope are very important instruments to incorporate into regular

training programs before injuries take place. I have seen Molly work on young horses, and horses of all ages, that were never faced with injuries and I was able to notice a significant difference in how they performed. It's important to treat our horses as athletes because we expect them to perform at high levels. When they are treated on a regular basis for maintenance work, it then turns into preventative programs where we do not see the setbacks that we have in horses that are not on these programs. Optimist was on a program prior to his incident, and since we can't prevent all situations such as this one, I believe that it allowed him to accept the treatments and respond faster to them. Since he was already used to being treated it kept him more relaxed, and he was comfortable with Molly when she began her work with him".

It's important to know the difference between lay-up and rehabilitation. A lay-up program is where the animal is allowed to rest for a specific amount of time while undergoing veterinary follow-up and care. A true rehabilitation program typically involves physical therapy equipment or modalities that assist the body in returning to normal function, condition, and capacity following an injury or disease process. If you choose to incorporate a thorough rehabilitation program for your animal, then there are steps you can take to assist you.

Please make note that this type of physical therapy is only to be applied by a properly trained therapist and must be authorized by the involved veterinarians.

Steps to take if you are faced with a similar situation and need help:

1. Contact your primary veterinarian immediately. Veterinary care is always applied first, prior to incorporating any type of physical therapy or rehabilitation.
2. Follow the suggested care from your veterinarian. Acuscope Therapy and other modalities are not substitutes for proper veterinary care. However, they are utilized to enhance veterinary work and accelerate the healing process of the patient.
3. Ask your veterinarian if there is a qualified therapist in your area who can become involved to incorporate a rehabilitation program.
4. Make sure that any therapist you seek care from is qualified and has gone through an approved training program. Any professional therapist will be able to show proof of certifications, offer references, and remains in good standing with their prospective schools. It is your right as an owner to ask what type of training someone has received, and ask for proof of their training prior to allowing them to work on your animal.
5. When seeking an Acuscope Therapist make sure that they have received their training through Animal Therapy Systems (ATS). ATS offers the only approved equine training program through the manufacturer, and is the only program that has veterinary input and approval. ATS is also the exclusive distributor for animal calibrated instruments. Utilizing correctly calibrated instruments is necessary in order to obtain the results that you have read about. You can also find out if a Certified ATS Acuscope Therapist remains in good standing with the company. (For more information please visit www.animaltherapysystems.com).

For more information about the Electro-Acuscope/Myoscope Therapy System, Animal Therapy System's training program, and Molly Wells please visit www.equinescence.com.

To learn more about Volker Brommann, his training techniques, and experiences as a well respected dressage trainer please visit www.volkerbrommann.com.

