



BACK WITH HIS FRIENDS: Luke hangs out in the bleachers with his buddies during a recent Calvary girls basketball game.

ing to be tough.

"I didn't have any sense that things were going to be okay until the next morning, when Jeff (Luke's dad) texted me and told me he was moving his arms and legs and they were removing the breathing tubes."

'A drum to bang at the moment'

Anhalt's father, Dr. Jeff Anhalt, was actually driving to the school when he received the shocking phone call, telling him his seemingly healthy son had just come very close to dying.

"I finished work early and our daughter Kate, who is on the girls varsity team, was set to practice after him and needed a jump rope. I had one and was on my way there," Dr. Anhalt said.

Almost a week after the incident, Dr. Anhalt said he was still not clear on all the details about the heroic efforts to save his son's life.

"The AED machine was used to shock him twice, at least once at the school, then another time," he said. "The second one was after the EMT's got there. It sounds like they left (the AED machine) on him during transport to the hospital. I don't know if the second shock happened during transport.

"They took him to Mercy, got him stabilized, and made the decision to transfer him to DeVos. We kind of alternated who stayed with him. He was in ICU the first night and my wife and daughter stayed, and I took the other ones home. The second night it was just me."

Dr. Anhalt said there was no reason to believe that Luke had any type of heart trouble.

"There were no hints at all," he said. "As of yet we have no underlying cause. They have ruled all the common things out. It was nothing that would have been picked up by a normal heart screening."

The Anhalts are acutely aware of the odds of an athlete surviving cardiac arrest, and are very grateful that Luke was an exception.

They note that the average age for sudden cardiac death is 17 1/2 - Luke's age at the time of the incident.

"Between 3,000 and 7,000 athletes per year have cardiac arrest in the U.S." Dr. Anhalt said. "About 90 percent are male, and about two-thirds of the incidents occur during basketball or football season. The survival rate, from what I can tell, is somewhere in the 12 percent range."

When asked how he and his family had been doing since the incident, Dr. Anhalt said it had been a bit of an emotional roller-coaster ride.

"There have been a lot of ups and downs," he said. "We are exceedingly grateful for that kid who's sitting there looking at me right

now, but we're also mindful of what has happened to other families."

Dr. Anhalt knows that families like the Leonards might have been spared their losses if functional AED machines were in all school gyms, with someone trained to apply them.

He's angered by the fact that many schools still do not have the life-saving machines, and Michigan state law does not require it.

"We have started to make some contacts to look at the reason that previous legislation failed to make it a requirement to have AED machines," he said. "My understanding so far is that there's some concern about liability for the schools. That's ridiculous.

"I had someone say to me today, schools do fire drills, and when is the last time a kid died in a school fire? We're going to keep pushing until we can figure this out. We have a drum to bang at the moment."

'It was good to see everyone'

Less than a week after the incident, Luke Anhalt was resting comfortably at home, with his relieved family around him.

His only plan was to rest over the holiday break, then return to school in January.

"Today I woke up at noon, I was up four hours, then took a two-hour nap," he said. "I'm tired from time to time, and sore sometimes on my chest and side where the incisions are, but it's not too bad. I was surprised.

"They implanted a defibrillator that will stay to protect me for the rest of my life. I can feel the square edge of it. It's kind of under my arm. I'm getting used to it actually. When it starts to hurt I can get some ice to help with the swelling."

Obviously the basketball season is over for Luke, almost before it got started. The Fruitport Calvary Eagles were only a few games into their season when he collapsed. Their game that was scheduled for the day after his incident was cancelled.

Anhalt's varsity sports career is over as well, because he's a senior who's been on the varsity soccer and basketball teams since he was a freshman, and the boys soccer season is in the fall.

He has a lot of tests and blood work ahead of him, as well as long periods of rest. He won't be able to resume full physical activity for quite some time.

"I was looking forward to it," Anhalt said about the basketball season. "But obviously now plans have changed. I'm more of a soccer guy, but I like basketball. It's fun."

But the disappointment of having his season cut short did not keep Anhalt away from his team for long.

On Dec. 18 Fruitport Calvary hosted Muskegon Catholic Central. Anhalt and his family had no plans to go, but as the evening wore on, they just couldn't help themselves.

"We were just kind of sitting at dinner, and my sister Kate said she kind of wanted to go, and I said I kind of wanted to, too, so we quickly got up and left," Anhalt said. "Nobody was planning on it. It was kind of out of the blue. We got there and there was 1:14 left in the game.

"I was really happy I went. The team and the coaches were really happy to see me. I walked in and heard some murmurs - 'Oh he's here.' It was a good time. It was a mixture of emotion. I felt happy and relieved, and it was good to see everyone."

The game did not go well at all for Fruitport Calvary Christian. The Eagles lost to Muskegon Catholic 77-44.

But after the trauma the players and coaches experienced when Luke collapsed, and the joy of seeing him enter the gym near the end of the game, the outcome seemed very irrelevant.

"There are so many things basketball-wise that we could have been upset about, and I could have hollered about," Coach Zehr said. "But God blessed that moment and everything in that moment, so things came out the way they did. It reminds you very quickly about what's important.

"Ultimately he's alive, and that makes all those other things moot points."