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## **Craig Bolton the fall guy as Nick Malceski returns for real**

Jenny Mcasey | May 17, 2008

**WHEN Craig Bolton fell on Nick Malceski's reconstructed knee at a closed training session yesterday, the Sydney coaches and medical staff who were watching no doubt winced.**

While they wanted to put Malceski under intense pressure, club doctor Nathan Gibbs said Bolton's heavy landing wasn't part of the planned fitness test.

Nevertheless, when Malceski got up with his knee intact, they knew he was ready to be selected in the senior side against Essendon tomorrow at ANZ Stadium.

The Swans yesterday picked Malceski exactly 12 weeks after his ruptured anterior cruciate ligament was repaired with an artificial fibre.

He is expected to play for 60 to 80 minutes - a half to two-thirds of the match.

"We are excited about him playing but we are not expecting him to set the world on fire on Sunday," coach Paul Roos said. "But he deserves to be in our best 22."

The marvel is that he will be there at all. Malceski will return to senior football nine months ahead of the usual schedule for a player with an ACL injury - a medical wonder sure to generate interest among all the professional football codes in Australia.

"It will be great if it works because it will revolutionise ACL ruptures," said Gibbs, who added they would not judge the success of the new procedure until Malceski has completed the season.

"It would be a great thing, not just for Nick's case but for anyone else in sports medicine, for high-profile or even amateur football players. To make a 12-month recovery become three is just fantastic."

Roos said Malceski trained so well during a 90-minute session yesterday that he made the decision simple.

"He did everything we wanted him to do," Roos said. "You are looking for some reason why you wouldn't play a player and none of us could come up with a reason."

Malceski, a superbly skilled running defender who was second in the club's best and fairest count last year, was shocked when told on Wednesday he might be playing seniors.

But last night he left the training track sporting a broad smile.

It was a stark contrast to the devastated player who sat on the sidelines after a NAB Cup game in Launceston on February 17, knowing he had ruptured the ACL in his right knee and faced a year out of football.

Immediately after the game Gibbs spoke to Malceski and raised the option of having the radical surgery which was pioneered in Europe.

Gibbs and Sydney surgeon Danny Biggs had been thinking about trying the new procedure for the past year.

"We were waiting for the right type of individual who would be interested in using it, and if you like, taking the risk, and Nick Malceski came along," Gibbs said.

"You could only do it with certain individuals and Nick has been switched on to the concept from day one."

Malceski began doing full training a fortnight ago, 10 weeks after his operation. He endured contest drills that became harder and harder, under Gibbs' watchful eye.

"With any player coming back from an injury like Nick has, a lot of it is confidence to allow yourself to get hit and twisted," Gibbs said.

"Craig Bolton did a favour for him today when he landed on his knee."

The Swans' decision to opt for the LARS (ligament augmentation and reconstruction system) operation in February was met with scepticism bordering on derision.

In the 1980s synthetic ligaments were tried, but with little success.

But Gibbs believes the bionic surgery has advanced so much that the repaired ligament is at no greater risk of again rupturing than one repaired via the traditional method, which generally involves a graft from the hamstring.

"The overseas experience from many countries who use this (surgery) now would say the re-rupture rate is the same as the traditional operation, which is about one in four or five breakdown again," he said.

"I am not going to be celebrating until the year is over, he has had a good season and the team has gone well."

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