“If this happened anywhere else, I suppose I’d be dead”.



In New Zealand every year over 2,000 people will have a cardiac arrest. Only 11% survive. When someone is in cardiac arrest, they will die unless bystanders respond quickly with CPR and an Automated External Defibrillator (AED).

Neal’s teammates recognised what was happening quickly. By recognising that Neal was unresponsive, not breathing normally, and by starting CPR, they saved Neal’s life.

In Neal’s words “if this happened anywhere else, I suppose I’d be dead”.

Michelle, a plastic surgeon playing for North Harbour had just finished her game and was warming down with her team in the carpark when another player asked if there were any

doctors on their team as someone needed assistance. As a plastic surgeon, Michelle doesn't do CPR frequently in the hospital and had never done CPR in the community. She was unsure how much use she would be but ran down to help.

Once she arrived Michelle joined a team of four people managing Neal's resuscitation. Michelle started managing Neal's airway, ensuring his brain received critically important oxygen while others were doing chest compressions.

Paddy, who was umpiring at the tournament and had just arrived back to the Wellington Hockey Stadium when he heard someone call for an AED, as a trained first responder and volunteer Coast Guard he rushed over to see if he could help. Paddy ran into the dugout where the event medics were already responding to the cardiac arrest along with a few of Neal's teammates and offered to take over CPR.

An AED was brought and attached however at this point Neal didn't have a shockable rhythm so a shock was not advised and the AED instructed the team to continue compressions.

Paddy recalls "looking at Neal's face and he wasn't looking good – but I just kept on going with CPR".

Emergency Services arrived quickly, and took over the resuscitation.

Michelle remembers leaving the dugout and finding her brother who was also playing at the tournament "I had a hug and a bit of a cry". Knowing how poor outcomes can be in a cardiac arrest, Michelle felt a real "lack of closure" as Neal was still unresponsive when emergency services took over the scene.

Paddy stayed with the event medics and recalls emergency services taking over the scene and Neal regaining consciousness before he was taken in the ambulance to Wellington Hospital.

Neal's heart had a blockage in his left anterior descending artery, at the hospital he had a stent inserted to keep his artery open. He was up walking around a day later.

The New Zealand Masters Hockey community is small and close knit, Michelle said she had the "best news to wake up to" on the Tuesday after Neal's arrest when her brother sent her a photo of Neal sitting up in bed at the hospital.

Ken Maplesden, GM Hockey Network at Hockey New Zealand oversees all the hockey events throughout the country. He was called about Neal's cardiac arrest 10 minutes after it

happened, at that point it was unclear if Neal would survive.

Ken says he is “really glad there was a positive outcome and that players took action alongside the event medics to save Neal’s life”.

Hockey New Zealand has made additions to their tournament health and safety following Neal’s arrest to ensure the best possible outcome can be achieved if another player has a cardiac arrest at one of their tournaments. “We have the Masters World Cup coming up in a few weeks where we will have AEDs not only at the venue and with event medics but also in each dugout on every turf. If someone is in cardiac arrest we want an AED immediately available to give that person the best chance of survival.”

Having had his arrest on the Monday, Neal was discharged from the hospital on the Wednesday morning and back at the turf on Wednesday afternoon to watch his team play.

Neal’s teammates were pleasantly surprised to see him and he managed to join them for a beer that they had kept behind the bar for him while he was in hospital.

Reflecting on this event Neal says “other than the cardiac arrest it was a great trip” He was in Wellington supporting his team for the remainer of the tournament, “I was dead longer than I had playing time!”.

Following his cardiac arrest, Neal was pleased to see a cardiologist and discover that there was no damage to his brain or heart following his arrest. This is due to bystanders quick response with high quality CPR and connecting an AED quickly.

Neal is back training and will be playing in the 2025 Masters Tournament where he is planning a catch up with Michelle and Paddy for the first time since his cardiac arrest.


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