



Rangers goalie Lundqvist eyes return from neck injury

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Injured Rangers goalie Henrik Lundqvist is getting closer to returning. He doesn't know exactly when he will, but once he gets the medical go-ahead, he says he will be ready to play.



(Photo: File/Getty Images)

NEW YORK – Injured Rangers goalie Henrik Lundqvist is getting closer to returning. He doesn't know exactly when he will, but once he gets the medical go-ahead, he says he will be ready to play.

Lundqvist spoke publicly Friday night for the first time since he was sidelined by a unique vascular injury in his neck as a result of being struck by a puck in a game in late January.

He has been able to work out on the ice, and face shots — as long as they are kept low — in recent days, and his conditioning is good. But with an injury such as this, it takes more than just feeling good to face game action again.

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Injured Rangers goalie Henrik Lundqvist is getting closer to returning. He doesn't know exactly when he will, but once he gets the medical go-ahead, he says he will be ready to play.

"I feel physically in good shape. I am waiting for the doctors," the just-turned 33-year-old goalie said at an event for The Henrik Lundqvist Foundation, featuring an exhibition of The Mask Collection. "We have a constant contact, and we talk about it and look at different things to make sure when they give me the go-ahead I am ready to go."

Lundqvist was injured Jan. 31 when he was struck by a shot by Carolina's Brad Malone. He finished that game and then played two nights later against Florida. But further tests revealed the severity of the injury, and with the potential risk of a stroke, he was shut down for the long term.

He has missed 15 games, but behind the stellar play of backup Cam Talbot, and one winning appearance by rookie Mackenzie Skapski, New York has gone 10-2-3 to challenge for first place in the Metropolitan Division and the Eastern Conference.

Lundqvist said he has avoided giving advice to Talbot, because there is no reason to mess with a good thing. Still, he looks forward to being back out there with his teammates.

"I know we're moving in the right direction, but we haven't set any date," Lundqvist said of his return. "Until then I am just going to focus on staying in shape and working on the ice. If I was unable to skate, it would have been a bigger issue because it would take me a much longer time to get game ready.

"Now I can skate, I can stay in shape and work hard. It's just the contact part I have to cut out."

Lundqvist looked healthy and fit as he hosted the exhibition of six goalie masks designed by celebrity friends created on MSG Network's "The Mask with Henrik Lundqvist" show.

An auction of the masks began Friday, and Lundqvist will wear each when he returns. He will sign them and give them to those who win auctions that will run until April.

One prominently displayed was the one-of-a-kind, crystal encrusted goalie mask created by artist Don Blanton. It sparkled as it spun in a case in the middle of the gallery.

That one won't see any game action.

"My neighbor makes a lot of different things," Lundqvist said. "When I talked to him about this project a couple of months ago, he said, 'I would love to help you out. In the past I have done a couple of different projects using crystals, and I would love to make one for you with the masks.'

"I saw it today for the first time and I am blown away. The amount of hours and work he put into this, it's amazing."

The entire project began about a year-and-a-half ago. The new six-episode TV series features Lundqvist in one-on-one interviews with celebrity friends Mario Batali, Michael J. Fox, Tiësto, Jeff Gordon and John McEnroe.


They all designed masks that will raise money to benefit The Henrik Lundqvist Foundation and the Garden of Dreams Foundation.

"It was fun to sit down with these people and talk about their passions and their life," Lundqvist said. "It's been a cool thing to be part of, and tonight we're kind of celebrating that whole project."

Now he just wants to put these masks into use. Once he gets back, Lundqvist should be fresh and ready to try to lead the Rangers to the Stanley Cup finals for the second straight year.

"You can choose so many ways to approach this, and for me right now I am taking this as an opportunity to rest," Lundqvist said. "I'm super excited to come back playing. I can't wait, but until then I will focus on the things I can control.

"It's kind of weird, though, this time of the year not being able to play. I miss that, but it's part of the game. Sometimes you get hurt and you just have to deal with it the right way. That's what I am trying to do."




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