

September 28, 2007 Friday
Final Edition

SECTION: A SECTION; Pg. 3A

HEADLINE: Batter's heart stopped by ball on diamond

BYLINE: Amy Clarke
STAFF WRITER

Andy Buff is only 11 years old, but he's already been to death's door -- and back.

Andy was playing in a youth baseball tournament at Lakeside Park recently when he was struck in the chest by a pitch.

Squaring around to bunt, he took the inside pitch to the chest and immediately collapsed to the ground.

"Everything just stopped," said Tad Buff, Andy's father and one of the coaches on Andy's 12-and-under team, the Carolina Buccaneers.

When Buff got to his son's side, Andy was unconscious and struggling to breathe.

"Someone screamed for a doctor because it looked like Andy was slipping away from us and not responding," Buff said. "Eventually we watched Andy lose his pulse and breathing."

Fortunately, that cry for help had reached Pat Lollis, an assistant coach for a team warming up on an adjacent field and a family practice doctor at Family Practice Associates in Easley.

"I was up at his head trying to keep his airway open and thinking, surely, surely he's not going to arrest, but he did," Lollis said.

Lollis immediately began performing CPR, and after about three rounds, Andy's heartbeat and breathing returned and he regained consciousness.

"I think at that point that even Dr. Lollis was overwhelmed," the elder Buff said.

During the several minutes that Andy lay at home plate, word spread quickly through the complex that a child was hurt. Games and practices came to a halt as teams on every field gathered on pitcher's mounds to pray for Andy.

"You could just hear the silence at the ballpark, and you knew that a lot of people were praying at that point," Lollis said.

An ambulance arrived moments after Andy was revived and took him to Greenville Memorial Hospital, where he spent two nights in the ICU before being released Monday.

Back at Wren Middle after missing one day, Andy said he's doing fine now. He said he doesn't remember much about the incident -- "getting hit with the ball and dropping down to my knees."

"I remember being on the stretcher and the ride over to the hospital."

Andy's supposed to take it easy for a couple of months, but he's eager to get back on the field.

"As an 11-year-old boy who's very athletic and active, it's kind of hard to keep him still," said his mom, Vicky.