

The Comeback Quarterback

J.J. McCarthy's Meniscus Surgery and Return to the Field

Minnesota Vikings quarterback J.J. McCarthy missed his entire rookie season in 2024 after suffering a torn meniscus in his right knee during the preseason. The meniscus is a crucial fibrocartilage cushion that disperses forces across the knee joint, and tears typically require surgery followed by months of rehabilitation to restore strength and mobility.

McCarthy underwent an initial surgery in August 2024 and a second minor procedure in November to address swelling that developed during rehab. Despite these challenges, he remained mentally engaged throughout, working closely with coaches to study game plans and maintain sharpness off the field. This mental preparation complemented his physical therapy, which focused on gradually rebuilding knee strength and function.

Now fully cleared by the Vikings' medical staff, McCarthy is expected to participate fully in offseason workouts and lead Minnesota's offense as the starting quarterback for the 2025 season. His comeback highlights the multifaceted nature of recovery from knee injuries—combining surgical intervention, personalized rehabilitation, and mental resilience.



Meniscus tears like McCarthy's are common in football due to high-impact movements, cutting, and pivoting stresses. Best practices in orthopaedic sports medicine typically involve minimally invasive arthroscopic surgery to repair a damaged meniscus, followed by tailored rehabilitation programs to optimize recovery while reducing risk of reinjury.

During the rehabilitation following meniscal surgery, it is most important to transition back to weight bearing activities on a gradual basis as the knee tolerates. With the minimally invasive surgical approach, many athletes' pain and other post-surgical symptoms resolve early and they have a tendency to progress and return to activity too quickly. This can result in relative overloading of the cartilage and subchondral (below the cartilage) bone of the knee and in turn, cartilage wear, swelling, subchondral fractures of the bone, prolonged recoveries and significant delays in return to sport.

This story serves as a powerful example for patients facing similar knee challenges—showing that with expert care, commitment to rehab, and mental focus, gradual return to peak performance and active lifestyles is achievable.

References: ESPN 2024, Minnesota Vikings Official Site 2024, The Athletic 2025