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Snowboarder battles back from brain injury

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Eric Vincent cherishes every moment he gets to spend on the slopes. The 19-year-old Champlain College student from Rhode Island has been snowboarding since he was 5 years old. But ask him to talk about last winter and there's not much he can tell you.

"I don't remember anything from that day and the whole week before," Vincent said.

Vincent was seriously injured in a snowboarding accident. He went off a jump in a terrain park and flew 30 feet into the air before landing on his side and collapsing both of his lungs.

"They say if you collapse your lungs you'll have 90 minutes to get the hospital, where they got me there in exactly 90 minutes," he said.

Vincent also broke his collarbone, his pelvis, several ribs, and suffered a lacerated liver; all serious injuries, but relatively minor when compared with his head injury. When Vincent landed his head slammed into the ground.

"He was right on the edge. He had a very, very severe traumatic brain injury with lots of swelling inside his brain, which requires the most advanced medical therapy to try and control that," said **Dr. Rob Williams of Fletcher Allen Health Care**. "Like I say, he came right to the knife edge."

Williams wasn't Vincent's doctor but he is familiar with his case and says a helmet likely saved the snowboarder's life. Vincent spent two weeks in a coma and had to relearn how to do just about everything, from playing his guitar to simple everyday tasks like showering.

"I'd be washing the same body parts over and over again and everything would just take me a lot longer," he said.

Stories like Vincent's are all too common. Severe head trauma accounts for about 15 percent of all skiing and snowboarding-related injuries, and is the most frequent cause of death on the slopes.

Studies show helmets reduce ski-related head injuries by 50 percent and while no states have laws mandating helmet use on the slopes, a helmet awareness program in Vermont seems to be helping.

According to Fletcher Allen Health Care only one-third of all skiers and riders in Vermont wore helmets in 2002, compared to almost 70 percent today.

"In the medical literature there's no controversy about this," Williams said. "Helmets are good, period."

Vincent agrees a helmet likely saved his life. [Keagan Harsha](#) - WCAX News