UK HealthCare experts diagnose twins’ rare heart condition, give brothers new lease on life

Jon Wes Adams usually went right when starting his run at the UK Arboretum.

But on the evening of June 28, he decided to go left, toward the center of the park. It was a decision that saved his life.

A little more than six miles into his jog, Jon Wes’ heart stopped and he collapsed. The condition, called sudden cardiac arrest, is fatal if not treated within minutes.

Because Jon Wes had taken a different route that evening, his collapse occurred near an outdoor concert where nearly 200 people had gathered. Several noticed him fall and rushed to his side. For nearly 20 minutes until paramedics arrived, four concert-goers performed CPR.

The paramedics used a defibrillator to shock Jon Wes’ heart back into a normal rhythm. He was then rushed to UK HealthCare, where doctors at the Gill Heart Institute began figuring out why an otherwise healthy 26-year-old’s heart had suddenly stopped beating.

Expert care at UK
When he arrived at the UK Chandler Emergency Department, Jon Wes was put in a medically induced coma to protect his brain and organs. His care team,

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– Gardner Adams

(continued)
led by cardiologist Alison Bailey, MD, began testing his heart function and activity to pinpoint the cause of his problem.

“You just can’t believe it’s happened,” Jon Wes’ father, Wesley Adams, said. “It’s like you hear about these things on TV – a basketball player dropping dead or a football player dropping dead, but you never think it’s going to happen to your own.”

Jon Wes’ doctors soon learned that his cardiac arrest had been caused by an arrhythmia, or an abnormal heartbeat. Further testing confirmed that Jon Wes had Brugada syndrome, a rare and potentially life-threatening heart rhythm disorder that is sometimes genetic, but which is most commonly seen in people of Asian descent.

After spending five days in the intensive care unit, Jon Wes was able to go home. Dr. Bailey suggested that Jon Wes get an implantable cardioverter defibrillator, or ICD, in case he experienced another life-threatening arrhythmia.

“Ironically, I was able to just walk out of the hospital then,” Jon Wes said, “but Dr. Bailey said, ‘If that’s my son, he’s not leaving without a defibrillator.’ So I said, ‘Go ahead and put it in.’”

Two lives saved

After Jon Wes received the ICD, focus turned to his twin brother, Gardner. Because Jon Wes’ arrhythmia was likely a genetic condition, the team at the Gill Heart Institute tested Gardner’s heart as well.

Gill cardiologist Samy-Claude Elayi, MD, showed Gardner’s electrocardiogram, or EKG, to a colleague with experience treating Brugada syndrome, and the diagnosis of the condition was confirmed.

“Gardner went back to UK, they did a stress test on his heart to confirm it, and they put an ICD in him before he left the hospital that day,” Wesley said.

Gardner said the concern that Dr. Bailey and the team at Gill expressed was remarkable – not just for Jon Wes’ well-being, but for his, too.

“It was a no-brainer for me to stay with UK for my care,” Gardner said. “The staff and doctors at UK have been phenomenal. It’s almost like an adopted family. I’ll get a text every now and then from Dr. Bailey asking how we’re doing. It’s been great.”

Back to baseball

Jon Wes and Gardner have always been athletic: They started playing baseball at the age of 6 and haven’t stopped since. Jon Wes is an assistant baseball coach for Asbury University in Wilmore, while Gardner has spent time playing professionally in the Atlanta Braves’ system and in Michigan.

Thanks to Dr. Bailey and the care team at UK HealthCare, the twins’ arrhythmia diagnoses haven’t changed their active lifestyles.

The brothers said their implanted defibrillators have given them peace of mind, allowing them to pursue their athletic endeavors without worry of another life-threatening event. In fact, they played in an alumni baseball game just four months after Jon Wes’ emergency, and Gardner plans to run a marathon this spring.

“Nothing has changed,” Gardner said. “We’re grateful and blessed.”

Well, one thing has changed, Jon Wes said. He continues to run at the UK Arboretum, but, he said with a smile. “I always take a left now.”

For more information about the services available at the UK Gill Heart Institute, call 800-333-8874.