

In this interview an athlete speaks out about their ACL injury from the moment it happened to the operation, the rehab, the comeback... and life after the comeback.

#29:



Jip Bartels (1993) suffered 3 ACL injury's (2010, 2011 left knee & 2012 right knee). The attacker played in youth teams (until second team) of AFC Ajax, FC Utrecht and the Dutch nationals. He signed a professional contract at the early age of 16 at AFC Ajax, turning down offers from clubs like Arsenal and AC Milan. A bright future was awaiting for him until the injury's ruined his dream.

However, this setback motivated him even more to achieve other things in life. Next to finishing his Masters at the University of Amsterdam and starting a football program in Australia, he continued to play football at a semi-professional level, in Holland at TEC (second division) and since 2017 in Melbourne, Australia!"



## 01

### WHEN, WHERE AND HOW DID IT HAPPEN?

"It actually happened 3 times. When I was 17, 18 and 19 years old. 3 times on artificial grass. 3 times I tried to control the ball and turn. 3 times the defender tried to get the ball but instead got my knee whilst my foot was stuck in the ground and my upper body was already turned. The first two times it was my left knee and the latter one it was my right knee.

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### IT ACTUALLY HAPPENED 3 TIMES.

The first time it happened was during a training session with the AFC Ajax under 17's at the Ajax Youth Academy in Amsterdam. Stefano Denswil (now Bologna FC in the Serie A, Italy) was too late with his tackle and 'pang'. Everybody could hear my ACL snap. Surprisingly it didn't hurt much, probably because of the shock. It did feel really wrong though.

It took me about 10 months to recover fully from this as I didn't want to rush it and take unnecessary risks at that age.



Second from the left.  
Dutch under 17 champions and topscorer.

Unfortunately, it didn't take long before it would happen again once I was fit. Almost exactly a year later, during a training session with the AFC Ajax under 19's, I suffered my second ACL injury after a similar incident.

Despite working with the best surgeons and physios a third time couldn't be prevented. At age 19 I was playing a match with FC Utrecht, another professional team in the Netherlands, and this time it would be my last game as a professional football player."

## 02

### WHAT WERE YOU THINKING ABOUT DURING THOSE MOMENTS?

"What I remember about the first time is that I just knew it was very wrong what had happened. On top of that I was very disappointed that I wouldn't be able to live up to the expectations that I, and the people around me, had.



Signing my first professional contract at AFC Ajax with former Dutch National coach Danny Blind.

I had just signed my first professional contract at AFC Ajax, aged just 16. The European Championship under 17's with the Dutch national team I could forget as well.



To be honest I don't remember much about the second time as it really got me by surprise. I remember I was upset and being comforted by the doctors.

The third and last time I remember very vividly though. I recognized the pain and sat down on the ground. I looked at my mother, who was in the stands, and remember that exchange of looks like yesterday. That exchange hurt more than anything. She came down into the dressing room and we just said nothing. I knew I had to forget about my dream to become a football star and that I would go to university with my friends."



AFC Ajax Champions and topscorer.

## 03

### DID YOU KNOW WHAT AN ACL INJURY WAS?

"First I had only heard of it before. Now I know almost everything about it and I can even tell immediately if someone suffered an ACL injury when I see it happen."

## 04

### WHERE AND BY WHOM DID YOU GET SURGERY?

"Cor van der Hart did all my surgeries. He's the specialist in the Netherlands."

## 05

### HOW DID THE SURGERIES GO?

"Based on the fact that I've had 3 surgeries one might expect that they didn't go well. But the opposite is true. They all went well and without complications.

Before, during and after the surgeries the doctors and physios turned me inside out to see if they could find anything that would explain any proneness regarding ACL injuries, but they couldn't find anything. Until now, almost 8 years after the last surgery, I haven't had any knee issues at all. I feel really confident about it. Every week I still do exercises to keep myself fit!"

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**EVERY WEEK I STILL DO EXERCISES TO KEEP MYSELF FIT.**

## 06

### WHERE DID YOU DO YOUR REHAB?

"The first 6 months of my rehabs I did at the KNVB (Dutch Royal Football Association) as that was closer to my home and I found it too hard to see my teammates go out and train every day. When I could go outside again, I went back to the club.



AFC Ajax under 19.  
Finalist First Champions League under 19's 2011-2012.





Mark Rekers is the physio that helped me out every time. I still see him on a regular basis when I'm in Holland to have a general check-up and keep myself fit. After all these years we have a good relationship. Just one little example of the positive things that I got out of these injuries."

## 07

### HOW DID THE REHABS GO?

"They went really well every time. Looking back on it I don't think anyone can be blamed for anything. Maybe it was all bad luck, we'll never know."



Playing in the second division in Holland.

## 08

### WAS THE PHYSICAL OR THE MENTAL PART HEAVIER? AND WHY?

"The mental part for sure. 95% recovery isn't enough with these injuries. It's all about the last steps, which are the hardest. However, in order to get to those last steps a lot needs happen first. You need to push yourself harder every week and deal with the setbacks and loneliness.

You need to be 105% fit and then you're still not sure whether you'll return to your previous level.

How I did it every time was by seeing 'the bigger picture'. For me it wasn't just about making my knee better, but about making my whole body and mind as strong, healthy and happy as I could be."

“ ”

**95% RECOVERY ISN'T ENOUGH WITH THESE INJURIES. ITS ALL ABOUT THE LAST STEPS, WHICH ARE THE HARDEST.**



Champions and topscorer with TEC



09

## WHEN DID YOU RETURN FROM THOSE INJURIES AND HOW WAS THAT?

"The time I was recovered from my second ACL injury remember the most vividly as I scored a goal for the Ajax under 19's on my return and I saw my mother getting tears in her eyes while she was in the stands. Very special moment still!"

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## ARE YOU PLAYING AND/OR TRAINING DIFFERENTLY NOW AFTER THESE INJURIES?

"Unfortunately, I am playing differently now. I'm less quick and less agile than I would have been and I'm always taking care of my body with weekly gym sessions outside of the regular training hours.

When I'm on the field I feel free though. Very rarely it crosses my mind, but it has been almost a decade ago as well by now."



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## WHAT WERE THE CONSEQUENCES OF THESE INJURIES IN RELATION TO YOUR CAREER?

"AFC Ajax and FC Utrecht didn't renew my professional contracts, which meant that I had to go to the second tier in Holland. As I never dreamt of the second tier and was afraid it would happen a fourth time, I decided to go to university in Amsterdam and play at a semi-professional level instead."



Scoring in Australia now.

“ ”

## OWN IT AND TURN IT INTO SOMETHING POSITIVE.

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## WHAT WOULD BE YOUR ADVICE FOR ATHLETES WITH A SIMILAR INJURY?

"Own it and turn it into something positive. Don't have a pity party as life isn't fair and there is no point in wasting energy on things you can't change.

This injury gives you the opportunity to enjoy and discover other things, so make sure you take advantage of that!"

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## BEST ATHLETE WITH AN ACL INJURY HISTORY?

"I have to think of Ronaldo immediately. But also Zlatan Ibrahimović did an amazing job suffering such an injury at his age. There are many athletes who fully recovered from the injury, so there is hope!"

“ ”

**THERE ARE MANY ATHLETES WHO FULLY RECOVERED FROM THE INJURY, SO THERE IS HOPE.**



*Proud of my individual trophies*

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## ANYTHING YOU'D LIKE TO ADD TO THIS INTERVIEW?

"As I previously said, try to focus on 'the bigger picture'. The injuries destroyed my dream of becoming a football star, but it had a lot of positives for me as well. I'm not saying that having an ACL injury is good for you, don't get me wrong.

However, if you 'own' it and make the best of it, it can turn out as something beneficial after all. Easier said than done of course, but it made me who I am today.

“ ”

**EASIER SAID THAN DONE OF COURSE, BUT IT MADE ME WHO I AM TODAY.**

You probably think I'm crazy, but sometimes I'm even happy it all happened as it gave me opportunities I thought I would never have. I had the best 5 years of my life living in Amsterdam with my (new) friends and now I'm currently living in Melbourne. Here I've started Montessori Football, whereby I support primary schools throughout Australia to set up their own football programs. How cool?"

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**HOW I DID IT EVERY TIME WAS BY SEEING 'THE BIGGER PICTURE'. FOR ME IT WASN'T JUST ABOUT MAKING MY KNEE BETTER, BUT ABOUT MAKING MY WHOLE BODY AND MIND AS STRONG, HEALTHY AND HAPPY AS I COULD BE.**

Foto's van Jip Bartels  
in dit artikel zijn afkomstig van hem zelf.



## **LINKS (SOME ARE DUTCH)**

Jip Bartels Highlight Video + Recommendations Davy Klaassen & Joel Veltman

[https://youtu.be/\\_fzQ\\_LudwOg](https://youtu.be/_fzQ_LudwOg)

Jip Bartels Manager Montessori Football Australia

<https://montessori.org.au/people/jip-bartels>

Van Ajax-toptalent naar VU-superstudent: het bitterzoete verhaal van Jip Bartels

<https://www.vice.com/nl/article/vd95a4/van-ajax-toptalent-naar-vu-superstudent>

'Ga iets doen in plaats verpieteren in de Jupiler League' – Voetbal International

<https://www.vi.nl/nieuws/ga-iets-doen-in-plaats-van-verpieteren-in-de-jupiler-league>

Team van Toen: Ajax B2 door Jip Bartels

<https://www.ajax.nl/streams/actueel/team-van-toen-b2-20082009.htm>

Jip Bartels vindt plezier in voetballen terug

<https://www.hetamsterdamschevoetbal.nl/jip-bartels-vindt-plezier-in-het-voetbal-terug-bij-tec/>

Jip Bartels eerste Ajax contract

<https://www.ajax.nl/streams/actueel/jeugdspelers-willen-hoge-ogen-gooien.htm>

Jip Bartels op zoek naar club met hulp van Klaassen & Veltman

<https://www.omroepgelderland.nl/nieuws/2131170>