

Freel taken to hospital after collision

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CINCINNATI — Reds right fielder Norris Hopper thinks centre-fielder Ryan Freel might have been unconscious before he hit the ground after the two players collided Monday in Cincinnati's 4-0 win over the Pittsburgh Pirates.

Freel was diagnosed with contusions to his head and neck after his head collided with Hopper's right elbow while Freel was catching Humberto Cota's fly ball to the warning track in right centre field.

"I wasn't sure what it was at first, but it was pretty hard," Hopper said after the game. "I watched the replay after the game, and I saw it was his head. I think it knocked him out, because he hit the ground pretty hard, but he was limp.

"I went over and got real close to his ear and screamed, 'Freel, Freel,' about four times. He opened his eyes slowly, and I said, 'Just lay there. They're coming.'"

Freel, known for his all-out play, was down for 13 minutes while being examined and was taken off the field on a stretcher. Scans of his head and neck taken at Good Samaritan Hospital were normal, according to the team.

The frightening scene took place in the third inning. After catching the ball, Freel's left arm was run into by Hopper. Freel was twirled around to his left and fell at the base of the wall.

"It was scary," Reds manager Jerry Narron said. "When you're going out there, you want him to get up off the ground. I was expecting to see him sit up. He hit pretty hard, and there was a lot of blood in his mouth, which surprised me. He was saying his neck was hurting."

"It takes the life out of the game for the period of time that they're working on him," Pittsburgh manager Jim Tracy said. "That was close to being a vicious, vicious hit. There's no question that (Freel's) one of the top three or four players in the league, if you're rating them by how hard they play."

After being examined by Reds trainers and physicians, Freel was turned over on his back, strapped to a stretcher, loaded into an ambulance and taken to the hospital. He is scheduled to be evaluated again on Tuesday, the Reds said.

Hopper remained in the game.

Freel, hitting .253 entering the game, was replaced by Ken Griffey Jr.

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