

Athletic trainer saves life of referee

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BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) - Jim Martek was the referee at a high school basketball game when he collapsed in the midst of a heart attack. He had an emotional reunion Thursday with the woman who saved his life.

"The last thing that I remember was walking into the locker room to get dressed and the next thing, I was waking up upstairs in ICU," Martek recounted.

Martek collapsed during a game between Mt. Mercy and Christian Central this past Friday night, and doctors say he was more than lucky.

"The death rate associated with what Mr. Martek had is very high. Only less than five percent of people actually live. Fortunately he is alive and she saved him," said Dr. Rob Wall, Cardiologist with the Cardiology Group of Western New York and the Catholic Health Heart Center at Mercy Hospital.

It was instinct that sent athletic trainer Melissa Hudecki springing across the basketball court to help Martek.

"I was just on the bleachers over here as he came running down the court starting at the baseline. He came up on this sideline here and collapsed just about center court," she recalled.

As with any emergency situation like this, timing is everything. Thankfully, Mt. Mercy Academy had an Automatic Electronic Defibrillator in place, something that is not required of Catholic and private schools.

"After about two cycles of CPR the AED was ready to use...had the pads in place and the rest is kind of history. The Buffalo firefighters were there in five minutes," added Hudecki.

Martek has had bouts with heart disease before and his cardiologist pointed out, someone doesn't necessarily have to fit into the overweight/unfit mold to be a candidate for a heart attack.

"Unfortunately some of the problem is his family history and the genetics that are associated with Mr. Martek. Even though he is fit and quite active, unfortunately he does have bad arteries," said Dr. Wall.

Thursday at Mercy Hospital, Martek began the first day of the rest of his life.

"I said, 'That's my angel of mercy.' And my family is so happy," Martek said.

His New Year's resolution is to learn CPR and he thinks that everyone should know the techniques necessary to save someone's life.