

BOWDEN'S SURGERY SUCCESSFUL

BYLINE: MIKE DAME; The Orlando Sentinel

Bobby Bowden owes a large debt of gratitude to a Gator today. And he's not ashamed to tell the world.

Bowden, the football coach at Florida State University, was walking without pain Monday afternoon just a few hours after undergoing major back surgery at Shands Hospital on the University of Florida campus.

Bowden, 64, is recovering so quickly, he could be discharged today, a day earlier than anticipated.

"It went as well as I could have possibly hoped," Bowden said through a hospital spokesman. "I'm ready to do whatever I can do, but I don't want to do anything that would be detrimental to my recovery."

Dr. Arthur Day, a neurosurgeon at Shands, removed fragments of a herniated disk in Bowden's lower back during the one-hour procedure.

"Everything went very well," said Day, who was recommended by several of Bowden's friends. "We found a very large ruptured disk, and it was very straightforward. He's in terrific health."

Day said Bowden will not have to change his lifestyle and should be able to participate in all his normal activities by the time FSU opens preseason camp next week.

In the days leading to Monday's surgery, Bowden received dozens of calls from upset FSU supporters, alarmed not by Bowden's impending operation, but by the fact he was having it done in Gainesville at a hospital operated by the University of Florida, FSU's hated athletic rival.

"I tell them, Lord, this ain't a football game, I'm just going to have my dang back cut on," Bowden said Sunday during a preseason news conference.

As he was being wheeled into the operating room, however, Bowden had some last-minute advice for Day. "He told me not to be too partisan in my decision-making," Day said.

Bowden injured his back July 24 during an Atlantic Coast Conference gathering at Saddlebrook resort near Tampa. His problems, however, began months earlier when he played with a strained back at a golf tournament for FSU boosters in Gainesville.

"That's why I was shooting so bad, I remember that," he said Sunday. "I had a strained back and I would play, and I could get through the day, but when I was through, I couldn't hardly walk."