



'It's later': the Alex Palczewski story

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“Your season’s over.”

The three words no athlete ever wants to hear.

Unfortunately for Prospect alumnus [Alex Palczewski](#), this is what he heard after suffering a fractured vertebrae in his neck while playing football during his junior year of high school. This put an end to the offensive lineman’s football season.

“I was in the hospital, [which was] obviously the worst time ever,” Palczewski said. “I was working my way to being a starter, and I was sad I got robbed [of that].”

While Palczewski’s high school football career came to a screeching halt, he did not let that stop him. Palczewski had to wear a neck brace for six to eight weeks, and he had to do numerous sessions of physical therapy as well as lot of lifting in order to come back for his senior season at Prospect.

Palczewski’s former coach, Tim Beishir, helped him throughout the process. When Palczewski was in the hospital, Beishir sent him a message talking about how he was going to come back stronger and ended it with “heal now, shine later.” About a year later, it was time for Palczewski’s senior season, and he sent the screenshot of Beishir’s text with one message back to Beishir: “It’s later.”

“[When Palczewski sent that text] I was like, ‘Oh yeah, we’re going to win,’” Beishir said. “We still exchange that message occasionally, ‘It’s later,’ because he’s been shining ever since.”

After a successful [senior season](#), Palczewski committed to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign to play offensive line. After arriving there, Palczewski made a huge impact from the start. He has been a starter since his freshman year and has only missed one game at the University of Illinois, which was his first game, due to an ankle injury. He also received the honor of third team All-Big 10 his junior year on top of being a captain that year.

“[Palczewski] is a really, really good player,” University of Illinois offensive line coach [Bob McClain](#) said. “[Palczewski] is a great person ... He’s a great leader for our entire football program. He’s the type of player that you love and want on your team because he’s very consistent. And you know he’s going to come to work every day with a great attitude, and he’s going to come to work with a purpose of getting better.”

However, Palczewski wasn’t always so certain he was going to have the opportunity to play at the University of Illinois because of how shaky his recruitment started during high school. He wasn’t on many teams’ radars, so Beishir took initiative and called as many coaches as possible trying to get Palczewski some offers. According to Pal-



IN THE TRENCHES: University of Illinois senior and Prospect alumnus Alex Palczewski (#63) gets ready to block a Northwestern defensive lineman. After only playing varsity football his senior year, Palczewski got offers from Syracuse, Vanderbilt and the University of Illinois where he would eventually end up playing. (photo courtesy of the University of Illinois Athletics)

czewski, without Beishir doing this, there’s a chance he would not have been able to play Division I football.

“I heard so many different stories about high school coaches who were just terrible with [recruiting] and don’t really help their players,” Palczewski said. “I trusted [Beishir]; he went above and beyond. I could never repay him for what he did because he truly changed my life, and I love him for that.”

Palczewski also received offers from Vanderbilt and Syracuse, but he chose the University of Illinois because it was much closer to home which allowed him to still spend time with family and friends.

“I was pretty confident [that he’d take his talents to the next level],” Beishir said. “It took a minute to convince someone to watch the film [of Palczewski] because these Big 10 departments believe, ‘Coach, it’s after his senior year; we would’ve known about somebody if they were real.’ Eventually, I got someone to watch it, then the wildfire took off.”

During Palczewski’s time at Prospect, his

parents didn’t think playing football would take him anywhere — especially after he got injured. They thought he should stop playing and focus on school. They were certainly wrong.

“I still bring it up to my dad [to] this day,” Palczewski said. “It was awesome [joining University of Illinois football], but the biggest thing is taking the financial burden off of [my parents by getting an athletic scholarship].”

Throughout high school, Palczewski worked a lot on technique and skill. Beishir helped him develop his abilities as an athlete greatly over his high school career. When Palczewski first started playing, he called himself “garbage.” Over the course of his high school career, he continued to improve and became a much better player.

According to Beishir, what made him exceptional was his flexibility and ability to move. Beishir said that is what a lot of big offensive lineman lack. Palczewski also said he really had to find respect for himself in order to start improving.

“Whenever someone says the name ‘Alex Palczewski,’ they always have an immediate [negative] connotation,” Palczewski said. “I knew I didn’t want to be known as the ‘guy who skips things — who doesn’t really care,’ so I decided I was going to work this hard.”

Since he’s been at the University of Illinois, he’s developed tremendously. The most valuable improvement for him was getting bigger. When he arrived at University of Illinois, he was about 6’6” and 260 pounds, but he now weighs roughly 315 pounds. He put on most of this weight with assistance from the University of Illinois’ weight and nutrition program.

“His physical development from being a 17-year-old and like a 21-year-old is enormous,” Beishir said. “They’ve got a Big 10 strength and conditioning program, and they’ve done a great job.”

In Palczewski’s senior year of high school, he was able to bench press 215 pounds and squat 315 pounds. Now, he can squat 500 pounds and bench 375 pounds.

McClain has seen him develop in other ways since coming to the University of Illinois in addition to getting stronger and putting on weight.

“He’s a perfectionist. His big thing is he’s always been a tough guy, [a] hard worker; his biggest thing is wanting to improve his fundamentals, technique — taking that to the next level,” McClain said. “... I’ve seen [Palczewski] progress rapidly with that. He’s the type of guy that’ll come up to me after

practice when you don’t have to do extra and say, ‘Hey coach, can you work on this with me or work on that with me?’ He wants to be different.”

Since Beishir had always been a big help to Palczewski throughout high school, they have stayed in touch throughout the years after his graduation. They exchange text messages, and Beishir has attended a few of his games. Beishir says he tries to watch all of his games on TV, too.

“I get nervous for [Palczewski] — more nervous than when I played [football],” Beishir said. “It’s a big thrill to watch him play.”

Palczewski has also kept in touch with some of his former Prospect teammates, as some of them also play sports at University of Illinois, too. One of his former teammates is Prospect alumnus [Bill Matzek](#), who was the center of the football team and now participates in the throwing events for the Track and Field team at the University of Illinois.

“We always come home from breaks ... and [have] to catch up with other people,” Matzek said. “But it’s nice because I don’t have to catch up with [Palczewski] because we’re still really good friends. You always lose contact with people [after leaving for college], and you sometimes have to lose friendships throughout college, but it’s nice because we maintained that [friendship] — even with his crazy football schedule.”

Matzek and Palczewski have been close all of their lives. Even now, they have been able to go to each other’s meets and games and spend time with each other in college. They have a closer connection due to the fact that they were former teammates; Matzek knows the roles in football, and Palczewski participated in track and field in high school, so they understand each other.

College football, and more specifically Big 10 football, is back in season. While there was some uncertainty about whether or not the season would happen, it was announced on Sept. 15 that the Big 10 would have an eight-game season with games that started the weekend of [Oct. 24](#), and the conference championship would be played on Dec. 19. This is good news for the University of Illinois football team, as many of the starters have been starting since their freshman year including Palczewski.

“The biggest thing is how far we’ve come,” Palczewski said. “... Just seeing how much work we’ve put in, how much we’ve grown; I just know this year’s going to be really special.”



Bigger, Faster, Stronger		
Comparing Alex Palczewski’s measurables from his senior year of high school to his senior year of college		
Category:	High School:	College:
Height:	6’6”	6’6”
Weight:	260 pounds	315 pounds
Bench:	215 pounds	315 pounds
Squat:	315 pounds	500 pounds

(photo courtesy of the University of Illinois Athletics)