

OUT FOR THE SEASON

Injuries can be truly devastating. One staffer talks about what it is like to deal with an injury and overcome it.

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THE GAME HAD barely begun. The clock started running for the second quarter, and the score was tight. Then, POP! I heard a scream from the defender next to me, and the ref blew his whistle. What just happened? Shocked by the pain, adrenaline pumping, I just walked off the court. I really had no idea what had just happened. It was painful, but I just thought this was something I could easily bounce back from.

The next day, I was sent to the hospital. Up until this appointment, I hadn't cried. But when the doctor told me that I had definitely torn my ACL, the tears fell. I didn't cry from the pain, but from the fact that all the hours I had spent preparing to make this a great season were for nothing. About two weeks later, I would have to get surgery. Up until then, I just ignored the pain. The worst pain (or at least I thought) was the initial tear.

Then the morning of surgery came. It had snowed the night before, and we drove to the hospital the next morning with the soft white remnants still blanketing the ground. The rest of that day and most of the following couple of days were pretty much a blur.

Now I had begun the most physically painful part of the process. The first week, post operation, was beyond frustrating. I couldn't do much of anything on my own. So, I had to rely on my family to help me with everything from getting food to getting dressed.

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Finally, around ten days after the operation, I was able to walk(ish)! Now I could begin physical therapy. Easy, right? I had passed the peak of physical pain. Little did I know, the hardest part to overcome would be the mental element.

Physical pain, with an injury like this, is something you can fight through. It's temporary and you can see the timeline of recovery. However, no one can give you a timeline for the mental pain or stress. That is set by you. My entire summer was devoted to perfecting my game. Sometimes, I would even spend six hours in the gym, but I loved every second of it.

Over the summer, I thought hard about going into collegiate level sports. I was told that if I just put in that much more effort and pulled out a great junior season, I would be there. Out of God's grace, before the season had started, I decided I wasn't going to enter college level athletics. I felt that it was just not where God wanted me after high school.

Little did I know that I would be stripped from playing for my entire junior year of basketball, after one fluke injury. Even though I don't want to play in college, I still love the sport. Basketball is my outlet. At times, it's all I think about. Running through games and plays in my head excites me, not to mention actually playing in the games.

Now I had to create a new outlet: physical therapy. The first day, I went into physical therapy quite unaware of how weak I really was. No more popping squats with 400 lbs. I guess. After surgery all my quad muscle had practically vanished. The first exercise they asked me to do was leg lifts, with zero weights. At the time this seemed like the hardest exercise I'd ever done. Finally, I got my leg up to about an inch off the mat. Frustration and disappointment are the words I can think of to describe how I felt in this moment. We repeated these boring and elementary exercises hundreds of times. This was my hell.

Then, about eight sessions into physical therapy something clicked. I realized how much I was improving. Even though these were the smallest bits of progress, it was and has been something that I could hold on to. Every day, I stepped into physical therapy remembering how excited I was when I was first able to put one pound weights on my ankles. I was a total beast with those. I was one step closer to reaching my goal of getting back on the court.

My next job was to be a great teammate and...water-boy. I never would have imagined how difficult this part of the process would be. It was easy to cheer for my teammates. I love them! But it's unimaginably depressing to sit on the sideline and watch all the excitement happening on the court and not actually be a part of it.

As ridiculous as it sounds, watching basketball



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on TV is still a difficult thing for me to do. I remember the first time I walked into the gym after my surgery. I had been avoiding the entire building for a few weeks and finally decided to suck it up. I walked across the court and all I could do was cry. I had so much pent up emotion, and it all came out.

It's an absurd idea to believe that I am no longer a part of the game. There are so many parts to basketball, and sports in general, other than playing on the court. Think about the coach. He never actually touches the ball during games. Yet, he is a vital part of the team. I just had to realize what my new role was.

Every team needs great bench-players. They need great teammates to encourage and motivate them from the sideline. How awkward would it be

if no one actually cheered in games? Half of the excitement would be lost.

Every day, I spend time thinking about my recovery and what I can't do. But in the words of my dad, this is "LOSER TALK." You will never find joy in looking at the things you can't do. You have to shift your focus onto things you can do. If that means being a water-boy; then be the best dang water-boy your school has ever seen! The process is still far from over.

It is a daily struggle for me not to be able to do something I love, but I will be back. As annoying and cliché as it is to hear in the midst of this situation, the saying remains true: all things happen for a reason. God is working behind the scenes to create something eternally good. |