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Basketballs Bounce Back But I Didn't

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Kelli Shivers

CMP 100 (MWF 2:00 pm)

Basketballs Bounce Back But I Didn't

I tripped and ended my entire athletic career in the blink of an eye. It was the third of December, just three days after I turned fourteen. We were doing our normal warmups and drills during basketball practice. I remember the girls calling plays and shots, Coach yelling as usual, the annoying whistles that seemed to echo for hours, basketballs being dribbled and passed, the overwhelming smell of sweat, swishes when shots were made and frustrated grunts when shots were missed, and even that squeaky noise from the shoes that slid against the court. And I was thinking my usual thoughts of wishing I hadn't joined the basketball team, which I only joined to keep myself conditioned for the upcoming track season, the sport I really cared about. But then in the midst of everything happening, all of a sudden, there was a loud thud. All that chaos came to a screeching halt and the gym was dead silent. I was the thud.

Up until this point, practice was going normally. We were put in pairs and each pair of girls would run to the basket. One girl would take the shot and the other girl would try to block the shot. I was the one blocking the shot. In basketball, to block the girl who took the shot, we had to put our hands up as soon as they took the shot, then quickly pivot around to box them out from getting their own rebounds and shooting again if they missed. While I turned to box her out, I tripped over her foot, and just like that, I went down.

Like any tough kid, I tried to get up and run it off. But just like a toddler learning how to walk, no sooner than I got up, I stumbled and went right back down. In that moment, I felt incredibly vulnerable and alone. In the midst of all the fast moving surroundings, everything

sounded distant and mumbled, as if I was underwater. The girls asked me if I was okay as my coach and the JV coach ran over to see what happened. After they tried to calm me down a little and see if I could get up, my coach called a break and two girls came over to help me up. They stood me up, I wrapped one arm around each of their shoulders, and they basically dragged me out to the trainers' office. Little did I know, that was the last time I warmed up with the girls. It was the last time I walked on and off the court as a player. The last time I was an athlete.

When I got into the trainer's office, I didn't really think anything was seriously wrong. No one did. My coach, the team, even the trainers just thought I had a bad fall and there would just be some minor swelling and bruising at worst. They ran through all the basic tests like any other injury. They asked me to try to bend my knee, stand on my own, rate the pain, and a bunch of other questions and tests. After they were done, no one thought it was serious but told me to come back before every practice to see if I could get back in and to rest it as much as possible. Then they gave me some ice and I went back to watch practice and rest. And that's exactly what I did for the next two weeks. I limped around school and sat on the sidelines during practice with my bag of ice cheering for the girls the best I could. But because nothing was getting better, the trainers recommended me to go see an orthopedic doctor to take some x-rays. On December 17th, I got an MRI on my knee, and it was this simple picture that changed my life forever.

It was in that moment that Dr. Cibischino, the man who took my x-ray, became my surgeon, and I was told some of the worst news I have ever been told in all my life. What seemed like a simple everyday fall resulted in a complete tear of my ACL and a partial but almost complete tear of my meniscus, two very important ligaments in my knee. I had to get an ACL and meniscus repair surgery on my left knee and would be out for track season. Those words hurt

more than anything. After many tears were shed, my surgery was scheduled for February 3rd and I left the doctor that day with a knee brace, crutches, and a broken heart. For the next two months, I hobbled my way around school, living my normal life, going to every basketball practice and game, continuing to cheer the girls on as I always did. And finally, my surgery date came around.

It was 7:00 in the morning, I was Dr. Cibischino's first surgery of the day. I had to go through typical surgery prep, like changing clothes, answering the same ten questions a hundred times, and meeting a bunch of people I barely remember. There was a lot of waiting around and built up anticipation and nervousness towards my surgery but it seemed as though every time I got nervous, a nurse sensed it because they came in just at the right time to reassure me that everything was going to work out just fine. After what seemed like years of waiting, I said my goodbyes to my mom and dad, and the nurses took me back to the operating room. On the way there, my anesthesiologist had already administered some of my anesthesia, so I never really remembered much after leaving my prep room. I was wheeled into the operating room, and there were tons of people there, probably interns and nurses or whoever else was needed for a surgery. My anesthesiologist came back over and said something to me that I honestly don't remember. Then he administered the rest of the anesthesia, and I must have been awake for another 6 seconds.

The next thing I remembered was waking up in the recovery room. When I first woke up, I was a bit disoriented. I didn't stay in that room for long because there was a woman in the area on the other side of the curtain surrounding my bed and she was loud. The last thing I wanted to hear after my surgery was loud, annoying and unnecessary noise, so they wheeled me up to the

pediatric floor of the hospital. Once I got there, the nurse gave me some apple juice and went to go get my parents. After we sat there for a bit to make sure I was stable, they finally let me go home, so they transported me into a wheelchair, got me into the car and we went home. They put a block in my leg before my surgery which numbed my entire left leg, so at first, I physically felt nothing until it wore off. From that point on, my everyday life became harder than I ever imagined, and my physical pain began to match my emotional pain.

Throughout the next six months of physical therapy, I worked to regain strength and movement in my “new knee.” There were definitely times when I wanted to give up and skip physical therapy because I lost most of my motivation. I wasn’t able to run during track season and I never even got to play any games on the basketball team because my accident happened the first day of practice. But I just kept repeating to myself, “Next season I’ll be back and better” and I kept pushing on through the pain.

And in just six months, I was running again, slower and a little lopsided, but running. I was cleared to go back to physical activity in August of 2015, just before my freshman year of high school. But as I went through other activities like marching band and gym, I had realized that running again that year was going to be harder than I thought. As Spring came around, I tried to join the track and field team but Doc, our trainer, advised that I should wait another year. Yet again, I was on the sidelines. And as I went through the rest of high school, it became more and more apparent that running would just be too much.

But oddly enough, my attitude completely changed. Instead of getting defeated and giving up or quitting, I began to apply the passion and dreams I had for running to other activities I loved in my life. Although I was upset that my athletic career ended, I found new

things to dream about. That was when I learned how to turn the negative things in my life into positives and keep my perseverance strong.

I never would've guessed that a simple fall could take so much away from me. Growing up, I always watched the Summer Olympics in awe of the runners and wished that one day I would be running beside them. Although that dream may now be a bit out of reach, in my heart, I will always be runner. I will always cherish the memories I do have with running and other sports, and appreciate how they helped shape me into the person I am now. I am far more determined than I was before to continue to prove to myself and others that I can overcome any obstacle that is thrown in my path of life. I look at everything in my life a little differently now and strive to come out of every situation better than when I entered it. I have come to realize that it was a blessing in disguise, and it took a really good fall to really find out where I stand in life.