

Remembering hockey

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The season was around the corner and the whole team was excited. The absence of a traditional hockey scent that smelled like sweat and body odor, meant there had not yet been a battle, or otherwise known as a game of hockey. But, everyone was excited to go to battle and everyone's noses were excited for that wonderful smell to start and seep in.

The hubris in the locker room was through the roof, everyone thought we had this game in the bag the team we played was known to be weak. That mentality heavily affected our pre game workout routine just moments earlier and we did not take our stretches seriously. I along with the team did not put the full effort into our stretches and lunges which were crucial exercises for injury prevention. The noise our feet normally make sprinting across the pavement sounded like a slow repetitive knock on a front door. I knew this was a bad work out, I felt an anxious pit in my stomach like a punch to the gut.

Constant fear running through my head questioning how I will perform, the same way I feel about math tests. However, there was a solution to conquer this fear, our locker room pump up. The screaming, singing, jumping and dancing made our pre-game pump ups sound and feel like you were sitting front row at a Drake concert. Loud cussing, people rapping along and of course the loud “lets get it boys!”. Ironically, the loud raging to rap music calmed me down and I felt ready to play. I had gotten on the ice feeling confident after our quick skate around and was ready to put a beat down on this team.

The frost from the cool ice. The satisfying feeling of my blades cutting the ice triggered that game time mentality in my head. But was my body ready? At some point during the game I went for a loose puck in the corner but did not approach it aggressively, I let my guard down and then BOOM! I got knocked straight into the boards. Falling straight to the ice I laid there for a second to gather myself. Feeling the ice's breath against my face I slowly got up like I was in bed on school mornings.

The rattling of the glass was constantly replaying in my head as I skated to the bench grabbing my shoulder. The rattle was as sudden as a thunder storm. I was startled still in a state of shock as well as a state of pain. Not knowing what was going on it felt like running into a wall in a pitch black room. A few seconds went by and I heard my coach "Sammy you alright?", "No", I replied.

Every time I tried lifting my arm I pinching sensation filled my arm and prevented me from using it. I immediately got off the ice when the next puck went out of play. It only took a matter of seconds but felt like minutes As soon as I got off the ice tears came to my eyes. I threw my stick stick down, tore my helmet off with better hand and looked my mom in the eyes. I did not say a word, the sad and worried expression on my face and the action of me grabbing my arm would be enough for her to understand the situation.

I ran to the locker room and sat there until I heard a noise that sounded like the commotion you hear when two people argue. However, it was not an argument that was taking place, it was a urgent effort on how to deal with my arm. Once I heard that I was reassured people were coming for me. My

mom and the mom of the goalie, Blake, who was also team manager, came in and wrapped my arm with ice and told me to sit and not move. The stillness was uncomfortable. When everyone left I broke down into tears, the last time I felt this many salty drips of H₂O run down my face was when my grandfather had passed away three years prior.

I felt defeated and angry all at once. I was a mess. The game ended and my teammate, Trevor, walked in the locker; he slammed his helmet and cussed at the top of his lungs. Uh oh, I thought. I knew the result was not great and it made me feel even worse. I sat through our post game speech in pain and disappointment wondering if I would ever make it back out on the ice.

However, my mood quickly changed when a few of my teammates helped untie my skates and undress my gear. In the moment, I knew that even if I never stepped foot on the ice again, these guys would be my brothers for life. Like I said earlier, hockey is a battle and these guys are your fellow soldiers, creating the bond between hockey players with utmost strength. I knew that no matter what my teammates would be there to help me get through this injury, but how bad was it? After the game I went back home and then straight to see Dr. Grogan who specializes in sports injuries.

He decided to give me an X-ray. I had a torn ligament in my collarbone and that I would be out for a month. Not the best news. The first month of our season was our only weekend where we go down to San Jose and play the other California teams. At the time, I thought this was the worst thing to happen, but little did I know that this experience would be an important part

of my career. It stung that the game I got injured in was our last pre-season game.

The official season had not even started yet and I was already out. All the work I had put in the last few years were to get up to this point and now it seemed like it was all over. I had started playing hockey late at around 13. Most kids start at around 3 or 4 but that didn't stop me. I had always believed I could go far and I sacrificed my effort towards school, my time with friends and of course my body.

I got all the way up to AA hockey, the second highest level of minor hockey, in only four years. Everyone said I couldn't do it but I defied the odds. During the time of my injury I reflected on my mistakes. I learned that you should never underestimate a team. Every game is a new game a bad team might have a good game and vice versa. I learned the principle of not getting too confident and treating every team the same.

I took the game too lightly and in warmups and didn't stretch. I didn't brace myself for the hit. I'd underestimated their players. Learning from my mistakes on the ice helped me grow off the ice. Letting your guard down anywhere can be very dangerous as our world is filled with evil.

Also, I realized that the reason we get knocked down is so that we can pick ourselves back up. A setback is a setup for a comeback, is the way I like to see it. The jubilation of my teammates and I when I came back reminded me of goal being scored and everyone is cheerful and gathered around together. I was happier than I was before and I was ready to get into the season and start taking it seriously. It ended up being one of my best seasons and

proved to me that obstacles can improve you. Everyone, not just athletes, need to understand that getting obstacles are helpful so we can learn to get passed them and progress using those experiences from the obstacle.

Not just in sports but in life. I know now not to let my guard down in any situations not just on the ice, because danger is every and we need to always be alert. Hockey being the dangerous sport that it is, injuries are often expected. Throughout the years I have seen many of my teammates suffer injuries. I have also seen how many of my teammates comeback from injuries for the better.

My good friend and teammate Hayden, like me, got injured before our AA season started. After a practice one morning Hayden was helping our coach, Alec, with a skills clinic. Shockingly, Hayden slipped on a puck bucket and tore a bone in his hip. I wasn't there but when I heard the news my jaw dropped like seeing Lebron come to the Lakers. The season had not even started and just like me Hayden was going to miss over a month of games. Not to mention, we played on the same line which made it worse.

Being that his injury was in his hip it affected him more harshly. Since the hips are a direct connection to the skating stride it would take much more healing to be able to skate full speed. However, similarly to my situation, Hayden used his injury as motivation to get back even stronger. He continued to stay positive and hope for the best and after training and working out more and more he was back on the ice in no time and was onae of our teams leading scorers. That just goes to show how you can turn around these bad situations and use them to propel you forward.

Another one of my friends and a former teammate whose name was Jake, also suffered a severe injury this past year. He was skating during the pre-season and landed awkwardly on his ankle tearing four ligaments. Cables had to be used to re-attach two bones together and stabilize joint. Again like me and my teammate Hayden, Jakes injury was in the pre-season. However his injury caused him to miss out the whole season. An entire season of hockey just gone down the drain in the blink of an eye.

Not only that but walking in crutches to school also took a toll on his life and made it more difficult to get around to class. Injury was not just affecting Jake's playing capabilities but also his off ice capabilities as well. As time went by though Jake got used to it and realized that injury happens. The other day we spoke and he has already gotten back on the ice and is beginning to practice again. Though he missed an entire season of hockey that he will never get back, he felt the experience changed him.

So when he was ready to get back he was determined not to waste this season and make the most of it. Not like me and my teammates was an aspiring hockey player named Travis Roy. Roy had worked his whole life and was dedicated to hockey. He got to play for Boston University one of the best division one hockey schools in the country. On October 20, 1995, 11 seconds into his first ever game as a college hockey player he slide headfirst into the boards and was paralyzed waste down.

I cant even imagine the fear running through his veins knowing he cant feel his body. Or the snap your neck makes like stepping on a tree branch. Or the devastation, working your whole life and getting to be on of the best at what

you do and then losing that in the blink of an eye. Watching the footage, you want to look away like when you feel a jump scare from a horror movie is about to happen. Sadly Travis Roy was not and will not be able to recover from his tragic injury. Not every time does one get lucky like me and is able to continue a career in hockey.

However, that does not mean he is incapable of making a difference in the world. The Travis Roy foundation that was started by himself is to help spinal cord injury survivors and to try and find a cure. The injury did not motivate him to get back on the ice but it motivated him to do something he is capable of, which is spreading the word and aiding others with the injuries he has. To say he did not “ get back up” after the his fall would be an understatement. Not only did he get back up, he flew! The positive changes he was able to accomplish with his foundation prove that even though someone will not even walk let alone skate again, they can still make a huge change on society. As we have seen, injuries are very prominent in hockey being it is a fast paced physical sport.

However, most athletic activities come with a price to pay if someone is not careful. Sports have been around for hundreds of years and injuries have been there with it. Hockey injuries are not the only brutal injuries that occur, any sport can be just as dangerous and result in serious injuries. My friend Zack is an outstanding basketball player, he has been playing all his life. Two years ago I saw him play and his head was down and he ran his shoulder into another player on accident.

Immediately he grabbed his army similarly to how I did. He was one of our best players at the time and it was a tough site to see. But, Zack was a warrior. He fought back from his injury and made one of the greatest comebacks. He ended up finishing the season and leading our team to the championships. His actions show that same “ we fall to get back up mentality” is applied to different sports not just hockey.

Shaun Livingston had one of the worst NBA injuries of all time. His whole leg bent the other way. Every time you watch the video of it you want to throw up that's how bad it is. He was out for years but when he finally returned he came back better than ever and won the NBA championship. Another case showing how athletes can all comeback and comeback for the better. Even though there are doubts and haters you just got to fight through it.

These professional players did not just do it for themselves they did it for me too and for you. Their comebacks were inspirations and allowed us to apply their situations to our very own if we ever got injured. The beauty of sports is that the principle is the same no matter what sport and therefore we can all learn from different sports. The injuries that occur are meant to be roadblocks but it is not about why or how there is a road block or even how to take a detour, it is about how we come back and drive through a paved road. Injuries are apart of sports but more so they are apart of life.

In life when we come to an obstacle we must figure out how to bypass it. Injuries in sports have been another way of life where we see these obstacles and it helps train us for when we are in life situations. Just like in life sports is a way for us to express ourselves and no one wants to get hurt while doing

that. However, the competitive nature that sports revolves around makes it so that injuries are bound to happen but that is okay. Because then we get more opportunities to learn how to recover and come back strong so we can apply that to our everyday lives. Hockey is nothing more than a pawn in the over arching kingdom of sports.

Along with all the other sports they are pawns that facilitate challenges for us athletes to figure out. Sports have never always been about the prize at the end. If you think that then you should not play sports. Sports is about the skills we can learn and apply outside the rink, outside the field, outside the court. Its these skills that will stick with us a lifetime.

When we are 70 years old I doubt we will be shooting three pointers or taking slap-shots. But we might be dealing with the death of a family member and of course losing a game is nothing like a personal loss but the loose correlation shows that there is some connection between life and sports even in this serious context. Sports is just a another scenario, an alternate reality that many people including me love to live in. Within that alternate reality is not all fun and games there are serious moments that can threaten if you will ever be able to return to that reality. Regardless if you can or can't comeback to sports. The comeback is the key.

Doing more than you did before your injury or obstacle is what defines a person and makes them to be strong. Living your life in that alternate reality is foolish, but taking skills from that reality and applying it to our reality is the purpose of that sports or that reality.