Nathan Jackman: Overcoming injuries and reaching forward

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Friday, March 13

When Nathan Jackman woke up that morning, he didn’t know if his dream of making semi-pro basketball would be over.

“Without [basketball], I felt lost and that there was nothing I could do in life,” he said.

Kind. Emotional. Hard-working. Those are just a few terms that previous coaches would use to describe Nathan Jackman, a current member of the Laurier Brantford men’s extramural basketball team, a team of which he has a strong connection with both on and off the court.

Growing up in Scarborough, Ontario, Jackman tried several different sports in his public school days until he found basketball which became his primary sport.

“I found basketball was my calling and I stuck with it,” he said, “It gave me a way to release stress and any anger I could have been feeling.”

Jackman attended and played on the basketball team for the Winston Churchill Collegiate Institute Bulldogs in Grade 9, and transferred to Sir John A. McDonald Collegiate Institute to play on the Black Scots for Grades 10-12, where his connection with basketball strengthened even further.

Outside of school, Jackman played for several Rep and AA teams, including Top Notch Stars, East York Hawks, and North Toronto Huskies, in which he had the opportunity to travel around the province and outside the country for competitive tournaments.

Basketball is more than just a sport for Jackman, it is a way of life, a culture that he surrounds himself in where he can be the best version of himself.

“Basketball helps me be the happy, calm, relaxed person who is able to see things in all aspects of life, and I don’t focus on being angry or having any grudges, I’m more focused on me enjoying life,” he said.

He often credits his greatest victories not to winning championships, but to defeating teams that are “regarded as practically unstoppable,” which gives him a high level of personal achievement.

Jackman’s passion for basketball does not stop with just playing. He has also coached senior girls basketball at his high school in Grade 12, and over a few summers, he has coached children ages 6-15 in developmental skills at a camp.

“Coaching and playing are two very different things,” he said, “Seeing how fast the game can be and little things that you’re missing can help you develop your own skills.”

Jackman was fortunate enough to have a wide range of support from friends, family, coaches, and other teammates throughout his basketball career. Through all the wins and losses, the struggles and the challenges, he has them to thank for making him become a better athlete both on and off the court.

His inspirations also include current NBA all-star LeBron James, and recently departed NBA legend Kobe Bryant for their unmatched mentality and overall IQ of the game, and their commitment to work on themselves mentally and physically to improve is what he looks up to.

In 2017, Jackman was accepted into Wilfrid Laurier University for a degree in criminology, and he continued to follow his passion for basketball as he tried out and was chosen to be on the extramural basketball team, a big step in his ultimate goal of making semi-pro overseas.

One of the most important things for Jackman is having a strong connection with teammates, where he can feel he has “made a bunch of brothers,” he said.

Andrew Kamenz, a third-year at Wilfrid Laurier and a member on the Laurier Brantford basketball team for three years enjoys the level of competition that Jackman brings to the court.

“He’s very competitive, we go back and forth all the time in practice, and he’s a great guy to be around,” he said.

Two years later, Jackman was all ready to start his third season of basketball with Laurier until he noticed he was getting chest pains during practice and off the court that affected his play. He went to the doctor and found out that he had pericarditis, which is defined by the American Heart Association as inflammation in the pericardium, which are two thin layers of tissue that surround the heart, hold it in place and help it work.

His doctor informed him that he should not play basketball until around December, which meant he could not play for the first half of the season.

Jackman had sustained two concussions in previous years playing basketball, but they were not as serious as this injury.

“Naturally, when I found out I couldn’t play, I broke down in tears, and it wasn’t just because of the fact I couldn’t play, it was because this was the one thing I had to help me relieve stress and deal with my mental health and overcome it,” he said.

Jackman continued to show up to practices and tournaments to support his team, even though he was unable to play. He described the experience on the sideline similar to when he was coaching.

“You’re seeing the court in a whole different way because you can’t physically do what you’re telling players to do, and you don’t see as much when you’re playing as you do on the sideline,” he said.

Despite his injury, Jackman still managed to bring the same energy to the team and keep everyone motivated.

Adam Kislinsky, a first-year at Wilfrid Laurier and a member of the basketball team, looks up to Jackman as a strong leader and a good friend.

“He’s calm and he creates [plays). He’s a good big man, he knows where to find guys, and he’s got to be the nicest guy on the team,” he said.

Currently, Jackman has recovered from his injury and has participated in his last two tournaments, one of which he and his team won a championship.

“Playing basketball was the only time I felt at home. I had a clear headspace and I wasn’t stressing about things,” he said.

Jackman now looks towards next year, where he hopes to make the varsity team for Laurier situated in Waterloo and further improve his basketball skills so that he can go overseas to play semi-pro, but he will always remember his time playing for Brantford’s team.

“I’m the happiest I can be playing with my team, they’re like my second family,” he said.