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“Nothing stops (Lorin Hom), and I truly mean nothing. She loves the sport more than anyone I know.”

—Celeste Boureille, Cal women's soccer player

W. SOCCER

I'M STILL STANDING

Lorin Hom's love for soccer has allowed her to keep playing despite four ACL injuries

“The longer you're not doing something you love, the harder it is.”

— Lorin Hom,
Cal women's soccer player

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Lorin Hom felt a shift in her knee. She ignored the sensation and kept running as her knee buckled a second time. She put it in the back of her mind because the game was yet to be won. But it was not until the third time that she knew something was actually wrong.

Hom, a fifth-year senior, felt the discomfort after a tackle against UC Riverside, but she did not want to want to get up and head to the sideline. She had already missed too much playing time with Cal to give up that easily.

When the swelling — light as it was — began to take place, Hom realized that she had torn her ACL during the collision.

Her fourth ACL tear in seven years.

At an age when most children cannot decide whether they want applesauce or raisins as a snack without crying, Hom knew she wanted to be on a field rather than inside a ballet studio with her older sister.

“I remember putting a tutu on her and sending her to ballet school with all of her friends and her sister and she went once,” said Lorin's mom, Mary Irene Zemanek. “She came in and ripped the tutu off and said, ‘I'm not going back. There's no ball, there's no team.’”

Hom ditched slippers for cleats, a tutu for a ball and a leotard for shorts and began playing sports into her teen years. She started off playing basketball, volleyball and soccer in eighth grade before cutting back to only volleyball and soccer her freshman year of high school and then focusing exclusively on soccer as a sophomore.

“She was incredible at anything she did, whether that be basketball or tennis,” said her lifelong friend and club soccer teammate Sara Cuddeback. “If she committed as much time as she did with soccer to any other sport she played, she would have 100 percent been recruited for whatever other sport that was.”

The spotlight was on Hom before she even reached high school and she caught the attention of her eventual coach at Marin Academy, Josh Kalkstein. He said it was hard to see it from this “little string bean of a kid” early on, but she proved herself the first time he saw her play. During her freshman year at Marin Academy, Hom earned North Coast Section first-team all-league recognition for her work on the field.

But Hom was about to undergo her first of many debilitating injuries, which kept her sidelined for most of high school, limiting the amount Kalkstein could actually coach her on the field. Hom would undergo her first round under the knife after she tore her right ACL in a pile up during the summer of 2008, with her club team, the De Anza Force.

The rehab process was a difficult one, as Hom had to rebuild her strength to what it once was while also being cautious of re aggravating her ACL. The fear of reinjuring her knee caused Hom to be more mindful of her style of play, and she no longer went into tackles as hard as she once did.

Though out of action for about eight months, Hom was more excited than nervous to get back on the field. She stepped back in right where she left off and continued playing with De Anza right up until the U.S. Youth Soccer National Championships in 2009.

Early in the second half of the final game, Hom dribbled through the defense and shot the ball from well outside the box. The ball soared past the goalie for the game's only goal. Hom's teammates erupted in celebration and dog piled onto her.

The celebration was short lived, however, as it was discovered that Hom's new ACL was faulty. The ligament had already stretched completely out only four months into use and needed to once again be replaced during the summer of her sophomore year of high school.

It was becoming apparent to Hom that having her same knee operated on for a second time in a little less than a year was taking its toll not only

physically but mentally.

“It gets worse (each time),” Hom says. “It gets worse because the reason I keep rehabbing and coming back is because I love to play. And the longer you're not doing something you love, the harder it is.”

During Hom's recovery her sophomore and junior years, she had to learn how to be a full-time contributor and mentor from the bench rather than on the field. She had a tough time being around a game during this time, as it was a constant reminder that she was not able to play.

“It is a big ask to ask a kid to be there for her team and be a mentor all while suffering your own psychological demons,” Kalkstein said. “It was hard.”

While Kalkstein was doing his best to help Hom adjust to not being on the field, he was limited to being with her during team practices.

So it was up to Hom's parents, Albert Hom and Zemanek, to support their daughter. They also had to try to address the elephant in the room: allowing their child to follow her dreams while reviewing the consequences that might come as a result. Her parents assured their daughter that soccer was not her only choice.

“With it all, she would not stop, even with me saying, ‘Lorin, look, you're so smart, you're a great artist, you're good at so many other things — you don't have to do this,’” Zemanek said. “You're not defined by soccer.”

Although they were obviously concerned, her parents did nothing to help change her mind, and Hom stuck with her decision to continue playing soccer.

“There's been times where I thought she was crazy, it was just too much. I would have given anything for her not to do this. And now I can't change it, and I believe in her,” Zemanek said. “I think she's inspired in a way that's otherworldly.”

As she was preparing to get back on the field for the first time in two years, Hom tore her ACL on the first day of tryouts her senior year, this time on her left knee. She was going to need all the support that she could get, as the new tear had effectively erased all the progress she had made during her previous two seasons rehabbing. The frustration was obviously a lot to handle for a star player who had been limited to playing her freshman year and still fully intended to play soccer again.

“To be fair, senior year, she really didn't want to be around (the team) at all,” Kalkstein said. “Because at that point, it had just gotten too hard for her. In the previous years, while there was always the possibility of her still being able to play for her team, she was still very much connected.”

Although Hom clearly did not have the high school soccer career that both she and Kalkstein would have hoped for, her success on the field during her freshman year and that following summer with her club team was enough to garner the attention of several top colleges. With several enticing offers, Hom ultimately decided she wanted to be a Bear and committed to Cal before her senior year.

With Marin Academy now behind her, it was time to start anew in Berkeley — both as a student and as an athlete. Her struggles were not over yet, unfortunately, after Hom moved from the Peninsula to the East Bay. She was redshirted her entire freshman campaign because of her senior-year injury and took the field only once during her sophomore year. Her first season as a full-time starter came this year, and she made all six starts before suffering her latest ACL tear Sept. 11.

Even with a torn ACL, she is still playing off the bench with her knee taped and braced, looking to make the best of her last season with Cal. While she might not physically be the same player she was before four ACL tears, Hom still carries the mindset that she did when she was just a child, wanting more than anything to be a part of the action.

“She's the type of player you want on the field because you know she'll give 110 percent effort,” said senior Cal forward Celeste Boureille. “Nothing stops her, and I truly mean nothing. She loves the sport more than anyone I know.” ■