

"The Effect That Soccer Has Had on My Life"

It all started when I was 7 years old and living in Sacramento, California. My first soccer team was known as the Swallows and our colors were blue and yellow. This was a time in a soccer player's life when our uniforms were so big that you could not see our legs between the end of our shorts and the tops of our socks and shin guards. And it was when the ball got kicked into a mud puddle, everyone stood around and stared at it and did not want to get into the water to get it out. I only played one year in California because my family had to pack up and move to the beautiful Huntsville, Alabama.

When I moved to Huntsville in 1998 a new companion of mine asked if I wanted to play AYSO soccer. So in an effort to get me to meet new people, my parents signed me up and my new team was called the Purple Piranhas. This team was where one of the longest lasting friendships began, with Christine who is still my best friend. So to make a long story short, we both went on to play with the Lady Kicks, then the Huntsville Soccer Club, then the SAMBA. Then we went on to play varsity soccer as freshman at Huntsville High School. And that year I scored the only goal that won us the State Championship our freshman year against Fort Payne.

The coach that has had the biggest impact on me and taught me the most about hard work and teamwork was Richard Todd. He formed the 89 Girls Samba team and saw our individual potential and taught us how to achieve our goals through hard work. There were times that we may not have liked him very much, but we knew that he cared about us as individuals as well as a team. He was not in the job just for himself, but for us. I don't think any of us would be where we are today without his influence and the influence of the game of soccer. I was taught to play fair and accept what is dealt to me, because of those lovely calls referees would make. While coaching us through many State Championships, he taught us discipline, self respect and sportsmanship.

Soccer has been a big part of my life since I was 8 years old. It helped me meet new people in a new hometown and create strong lasting relationships with girls and their parents that I know I will stay in touch with the rest of my life. It has taught me what team work and sportsmanship is all about. It has given me the opportunity to travel and meet new people and see many places I may not have seen if we weren't playing a soccer tournament. The sport of soccer has taught me that if you want something bad enough and work hard enough you can accomplish anything.

Respect for my body and wanting to keep in shape for soccer has also been a big influence that has kept me from getting involved with alcohol and drugs or even smoking. When you get in high school you see many of your friends and others experimenting to see what it is all about. But my desire to keep in shape has helped me resist those temptations.

You know that old saying? "You don't know what you have until you lose it?" Well that is what happened in the fall of 2004 when I broke my leg in half, in a Region III game. When I thought I could never play soccer again I realized how important soccer was in my life. Soccer had been my life since I was 8 years old and I didn't know what was going to happen.

After I broke my leg, I had to have a steel rod put in my leg and had as many as six surgeries to fix all the damage done. After the sixth surgery and a lot of physical

therapy and hard work I was finally able to play. But unfortunately the team I had played with for six years had kept moving forward and I was unable to keep up with them. They were on a team where they would be scouted by numerous college coaches and I was sure they would have many offers. Even though I knew my dream of playing in college was over, I still really wanted to keep playing soccer and retain my starting position on the Huntsville High Varsity team again.

My drive to get my starting position back is what pushed me to work hard to rehabilitate myself. My love for the game and the desire to be back with my friends and teammates is what drove me to get stronger.

Knowing I was not going to be able to join my old team on the Vestavia Attack, the coaches of the Division II U18 Banzai, Mr. Keith Lanford and Mr. Jim Saunders asked if I wanted to play on their team in the fall of 2005. They were not even sure I could play, but they were kind enough to offer me a spot on the team. I will always be grateful to them for giving me an opportunity to play soccer again. Not many other coaches would have even looked at me.

Their confidence in me, knowing my love for the game and how much I wanted to be a part of a team again gave me the drive I needed to keep improving. I played with them for the 2005 and 2006 seasons and the team won the Division II State Championship both years. Every time I played I got better and today I have regained my starting position on the Huntsville High soccer team as a senior. Because soccer taught me self-discipline and hard work, I was able to rehabilitate myself and play the sport I love.

This same hard work ethic and self-discipline that I have learned through soccer is what I will rely on to help me in my future in college and any career I pursue. I can always look back at those days of grueling workouts of two mile runs in the hot summer practices and the freezing cold nights of the early spring season, and know that if I can handle those tough times I can handle anything that life throws at me. Yes, even going after those balls in the mud puddles.