



**Brain Injury
Alliance**
ARIZONA

MY CONCUSSION STORY

The Brain Injury Alliance of Arizona is gearing up for September 21, National Concussion Day by sharing some of the personal stories, thoughts, and artwork of those who have been impacted by concussion. We are proud to bring you Tyler Roland's personal account of life after concussion.

“What If?”

By TYLER ROLAND

Phoenix — What if, what if, what if? We all have those “what if?” moments in life that we can’t seem to help thinking about. We often concern ourselves with an alternate ending to a situation after it has already happened. For example, what if we hadn’t bombed that job interview and had ended up in the job of our dreams? Life would be completely different, right? I know for myself personally, I could sit around for hours thinking about the “what ifs?” to every situation. Just imagining the different outcomes absolutely blows my mind and fascinates me.

Sometimes we think about the “what ifs?” so much that it can become painful. We “what if?” this and “what if?” that to the point that it hurts us mentally and emotionally.

I’ve definitely had my fair share



of self-blaming moments for the outcomes of certain situations — “what if you’d done it a different way?” or “you shouldn’t have done it like that,” but in reality, there is no way to turn back time to fix whatever happened in the past. So why do we concern ourselves with these

“what if?” scenarios all the time? Who knows? It may just be how the human psyche tries to work out our problems for us sometimes.

One of my big “what if” moments happened during winter break of my senior year when I was supposed to get up for early morning basketball practice. Basketball was my life, my passion, my love, my everything; it was pretty much all I ever did. But on this particular morning for some reason, even though my alarm rang, I decided to go back to sleep for what was supposed to be “two more minutes”; however, those two minutes turned into thirty. I woke up five minutes before practice started. Since I was late and tired, I almost didn’t go and was just going to fall back asleep, but me being who I am, I knew I couldn’t live with myself if I did that. I was never late nor had I skipped a practice for any reason. So, I rushed to practice, barely making it on time. Halfway through practice, I was accidentally hit by a teammate in the mouth, which caused a concussion, which caused me to no longer be able to play basketball.

Now, imagine having the thing you love most taken from you within seconds. Every day, four months later, I sometimes still think, “what if I hadn’t actually woken up that day?” “What if I was a different type of person, the type who can handle skipping practice without feeling guilty?” “What if I hadn’t been hit?” It killed me to think about it and all the “what ifs?” just from this situation alone. But we can’t change the past; what has happened has happened; we can’t go back in time and relive a situation and



change the outcome to what we wish could have happened.

I became a whole different person the first two-to-three months after my basketball injury. I didn’t talk or eat like I used to; in fact, I lost almost ten pounds. It completely changed every aspect of my life, both on and off the court. Life absolutely sucked for a while; there’s no other way to put it, and people would always tell me to keep my head up and that things would get better, but nothing seemed to change. I really thought the injured version of myself was the person I was going to be from then on. I couldn’t stand it; I hated it. I had always loved being the happy, joyful, and goofy kid and I missed being that way. So, I knew I had to do something; I would think about it every day, but I had no clue what I was going to do; I simply didn’t know how to fix it.

I’ve always believed in the old saying that everything happens for a reason, but whenever I would try saying that to myself post-injury, I would just get mad and upset because I didn’t understand why this had happened. What could I possibly have done to deserve this? I used

to beat myself up all the time over it.

But what if we focused on the possibility for positive future outcomes instead of the all the “what-ifs?” As I’ve said, we can’t change the past, but we sure can shape the future. Instead of dwelling on the past, which I regret doing, and worrying about the future, which I hate doing, I’m trying to look for the positives in every situation. I used to think my life was ruined after I couldn’t play basketball anymore, but I was wrong. Obviously, it sucks, but there’s more to life than any one thing. Yes, it may be the thing we love that seems like it was taken from us, but eventually, we move on and find a new passion, a new love, or a new, well, whatever it may be. Life happens, we can’t do anything about that; stuff happens that we have no control over. But there are things we can control, and that’s where we can place our focus.

So, don’t feel bad for me, don’t pity me, and don’t show any sympathy for me. I am happy now, and believe it or not, I am happy



this happened to me because now I have found a new passion—sharing my story and helping people through whatever they are going through. I truly believe I am here to inspire people, not to make them feel bad for me. My goal is to spread the important message of how to overcome whatever problems people may be facing. After four months of depression and hatred, I am finally starting to realize what the positive side to my situation is, and I wouldn’t change anything that has happened; it has shaped me as a person and has shown how strong I can be by not giving up or just waiting for the day to come when I magically become my former self again.

At the end of the day, no matter what punches life may throw at us, even if it knocks us down, we have to get right back up and fight back. My main message is that there’s no time to dwell on the past and all the “what ifs?” because there is no possible way to change it; we can only focus on the future and what is to come, find our passions in life, and pursue them.

Tyler Roland is an eighteen-year-old concussion survivor. He is attending Glendale Community College and lives in the Valley. Through sharing his story, he is hoping to raise awareness about the invisible injury, concussion. It is his hope to work with organizations such as the Brain Injury Alliance of Arizona to create a compassionate and educated world to support survivors of brain injury as they heal. He also shares his story so that student athletes can make educated choices when enjoying athletic activities. He enjoys working out, coaching basketball and hanging out with friends.

PHOTOS BY ED NOJAKITIS