

Beyond the game

THE STORY BEHIND STUDENT ATHLETES



Defense Counts



Tatum Hopper

Fighting through adversity. Not quitting. Not giving up. Not staying down. These phrases could apply to any one of the 30+ Club Sport teams affiliated with UA Campus Recreation, and to the hundreds of athletes comprising them.

But they also apply elsewhere in the program. And to one tireless worker who strives for the best continually, not so much on the field, but rather, in the office.

The Sports office to be exact. That's where you can find Tatum Hopper most days. As a Student Coordinator she has additional obligations at work, on top of taking 18 units as a student. However, her passion for athletics is not limited to a desk. Sports have been a part of Tatum's life for a very long time.

Tatum grew up around soccer. She started playing at the age of four; at eight she started going to her brother's games.

"My hero was my big brother," she says. "He was the captain of the local high school soccer team."

Jake had made the varsity team as a freshman, and going into his junior season, he was named team captain.

Tatum followed his games closely, even watching them at playoffs and then at the state tourney (where the team would ultimately finish as runners-up). Seeing all this galvanized her to follow in his footsteps. Tatum aspired to the same level of success, telling herself that she too would be a captain of her high school team by her senior year. And Jake supported her all the way.

"Besides my parents, he was my biggest fan," she says.

Freshman year of high school, Tatum was on the JV squad. She made varsity as a sophomore but sat the bench the entire season. Things changed her junior year.

"I won *Most Valuable Defensive Player* and I was First Team All-Region," she says. "The same awards my brother won his junior year."

Senior year, she was named team captain.

Jake's achievements in high school had not gone unnoticed by college coaches. His performances earned him offers to play soccer in college. But it was not to be. During his final high school season, he suffered a terrible injury after a slide tackle and his scholarship offer was revoked.

Tatum was a prospect in the same fashion. Fresh off of a successful junior season, she had received offers to play from a number of colleges. And then, heartbreakingly...

"Our first game of the [senior] season, I jumped up for a header and tore all the ligaments around my foot," she says. "I only had the skin and tendons holding my bones."

Surgery for the Lisfranc fracture, as the injury is called, resulted in 2 plates and 6 screws placed in Tatum's foot. Nerve damage along her foot prevented her from playing in the same way. Even after undergoing months of physical therapy. Her soccer career was over.

"It was awful," she says.

Because of his own harrowing experience, Jake was able to relate to Tatum in a way that others simply couldn't. He talked her through the mental and physical trauma that resulted from her injury.

It's easy to imagine someone giving up at this point. After improving to such a degree, and having such a bright future ahead on the horizon... to see all of this disappear so quickly could defeat a person utterly.

But not Tatum. She doesn't give up when things get difficult. And she credits her father with instilling this mentality in her. Though he would travel often and widely for work, he still made the time to attend every one of her regular season games in high school.

"Even after I got hurt he'd still show up to the games, because I would go," she says.

Tatum also ran cross-country in high school, and she recalls a time when she wanted to quit the team.

"He asked me if I would feel guilty, letting my teammates down," she says. "And I didn't think about that."

She didn't quit, and ended up medaling at the next event. Her father's example and teachings helped Tatum build an unshakable resolve.

Tatum doesn't play soccer competitively anymore, but the game is still a part of her. And not just at the UA. Last winter break, she volunteered at an orphanage in Malindi, Kenya, a town about 70 miles northeast of Mombasa. The orphanage had a small courtyard and the kids would play soccer there.

Or rather, the boys would; the girls would simply look on. Tatum gave them a different idea.

"I had a ball, and I passed it to them," Tatum recalls. "Their faces lit up. A girl, playing soccer? That's not a thing that happens."

Tatum got them to join in and play with her, showing them just what could be. They didn't even speak the same language.

"We were able to connect through soccer," she says.

Tatum Hopper is a play maker and her story is the proof. She moves from strength to strength, never resting in the search for what she could do next. Tatum dwells in the realm of what's possible, and not only that... she empowers others to do the same.



BEYOND THE GAME