

## Making a Difference

How many times are you asked, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” The answer for me is countless times. I have known since I was in middle school that I wanted to be a physical therapist. I was competing at the elite level of gymnastics at the very early age of 11. With that elite status, I quickly learned that injuries were going to be a frequent part of life. I also became very good friends with my physical therapist (and orthopedic doctor) due to those frequent injuries.

My first major injury occurred when I was 11 years old. I had severe hip pain. The doctors ordered diagnostic test after diagnostic test with no diagnosis. I went to physical therapy for months at a time. I would get a little bit better and then the pain would return in full force. I competed at the World Age Group Championships in November 2017 and I was in excruciating pain. All of the USA trainers and doctors said I was faking because they couldn't find anything wrong with me. Once we returned to the US, my parents took me to a back and hip specialist and I was immediately diagnosed with an L5/S1 spinal fracture. My recovery took almost a year, with many, many physical therapy visits. I missed an entire season of gymnastics and I was devastated. The emotional toll this injury had on me was as severe as the physical injury.

Following my dream to become a physical therapist, I will attend Central Christian College of Kansas. I will double major in exercise science and psychology and minor in business, while also competing as a member of the Lady Tiger volleyball team. Once I complete my undergraduate studies, I will transfer to a Doctorate of Physical Therapy (DPT) program. My goal is to attend the new DPT program at Tarleton State University. The emotional issues that I experienced with my injury are the reason I plan to also major in psychology. I strongly believe that you are not fully healed from a physical injury without addressing the emotional injury. I want to be prepared to help individuals deal with both the physical and emotional aspects of injury.

Once I complete the DPT program, my short term goal is to work for the NFL or MLB. I feel this will give me the opportunity to gain tremendous experience working with high level athletes. After gaining experience, I hope to open my own private practice physical therapy clinic in my rural home town. In private practice, I want to work with all populations, but specialize in athletic and sports injuries. I believe that by returning to my home town I will be able to give back to the community that has poured so much into me.

Physical therapy has been a substantial part of my life since I was very young. My experiences with athletic injuries are what led me to the dream of becoming a physical therapist. The emotional pain that accompanied the physical pain is what has encouraged me to pursue a double major. I want to ensure that I am prepared to assist patients with both physical and emotional trauma that is associated with injuries. Hopefully, I will be able to touch the lives of many individuals, just as my physical therapists have touched mine.