

Coping with Injuries as a Runner

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When an athlete gets into great shape and are on top of their game they are constantly walking a tightrope. They've followed a training plan, have been working hard to get maximum benefit and are on the cusp of attaining their goal race or season goals. Sometimes one wrong step, one too many hard workouts, not enough recovery, worn out shoes or just plain bad luck can strike. Unfortunately, injuries, sometimes serious ones, can occur at the most inopportune time. They can be devastating psychologically and leave an athlete unable to do their "normal" training routine for months. And then comes the . . . "Why me? Why now? What went wrong?" questions that play games with your head. Not a nice place to be. After all, you've worked hard, done everything right or so you thought and have sacrificed a lot. It's not fair you say . . . and you are right but reality is . . . it happens.

I can't think of too many of the top marathoners in the world who haven't had a major set back, surgeries, or life circumstance that get in the way of pursuing their dreams. Often, injuries occur because of the extremes athletes put their bodies through to be in top shape. Kara Goucher, Deanna Kastor, Paula Radcliffe, and Dathan Ritzenheimer, are but a few great runners who have had significant set backs but have "come back". They, like you are constantly seeking to reach the top of their athletic ability. Unlike most of us, these people are often surrounded with six digit figure contracts and an army of coaches, therapists, doctors and agents that aid in keeping them in top form. But they go through the same issues the rest of us do.

While it is extremely difficult to deal with and get over the disappointment brought about by most injuries, the good news is, in 95% of all cases, you will recover and come back, perhaps even stronger. That is the mark of a champion, overcoming adversity and coming back. One of our former top runners, Neal Holtschulte, now out of the Rochester area, when in his second year of college (DIII Williams) got injured. He could not run a step for a year. He was a very good runner but not great at the time. What did he do? He found cross training drills he could do that didn't hurt, in order to keep/improve his cardio-vascular fitness. In fact, he was so motivated to come back he surpassed what he had before. He did a lot of jump rope drills, plyometric drills, swimming and core exercises. Once recovered he was strong and trained hard again. He came back in his senior year to win the NCAA DIII National Cross Country Championships in 2005. In my mind his story represents that of a true running champion and person.

I also recall the story of Picabo Street, the great American Olympic skier. She won the silver medal in the 1994 Winter Olympics and several World cup titles in 1995-96. She suffered a complete tear in the anterior cruciate and a partial tear of the medial collateral ligament in late 1996 during a training run in Vail, Colorado. Picabo underwent reconstructive surgery for the knee immediately. She then battled depression within the first month but eventually put together a plan to be at the 1998 Nagano Olympics. She rehabbed, could not ski and had about a year to recover before the Olympics. A year out, she "piggy backed" on her coaches back down the Super G course that would be used during the '98 Olympics. She memorized the course and developed a plan that made sense to ski her absolute best. She did not race in a World Cup event leading up to the Olympics but made the US team. The end result? Gold Medal in the Super G at the Olympics. UNBELIEVABLE! I was fortunate enough to watch it unfold on television that year and it was spectacular to say the least.

Then of course is the story of Joan Benoit Samuelson. Preparing for the '84 US Olympic Trials in the marathon she needed orthoscopic surgery on her knee 17 days before the trials. Despite all the anxiety and difficulties to recover in time, she won the trials. Several months later she went on to win the gold medal in the first women's marathon in the Los Angeles Olympics. A phenomenal accomplishment to say the least. Read more about Joanie, one of the most celebrated and motivating distance runners of our time at: <http://www.joanbenoitsamuelson.com/>

The moral of these stories is that you can come back, you can be successful and attain your goals and reach your dreams. You need to be dedicated and work hard. You need to give it some time. You need to let people help you recover and get you strong again. You need to stay positive and get back to training in a graduated manner. You need to have a plan. Work with a therapist and a coach you have confidence in. Work with your friends and get support from them and your fellow runners. You can and you will be successful. Live Well Now! Go for it!