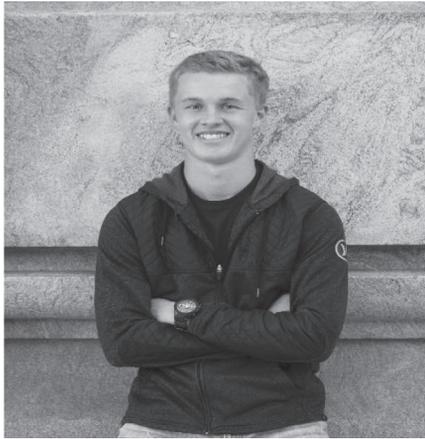


# KBCA Student Athlete Courage Award 2017



## Cole Taylor Andover Central High School

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shot of my life to take the lead for the final time and upset the top seed.

Following the win, once the commotion in the locker room had settled down, I noticed tears coming forward and the emotions from the past 5 and a half months coming forward from the heart wrenching pain of reading my MRI or the physical, mental and emotional pain from the rehab to even the happiness I felt the day I was cleared. At this moment, I truly recognized how special the moment was and how much the sport of basketball meant to me. I know this award is meant to recognize what I have done, but when a young man like me has to deal with an experience like this, it is impossible to make it through on your own. Without the help of my parents, my friends, and my coaches, especially Coach Herrmann for believing in me every step along the way, I wouldn't be where I am today.

Coach Jesse Herrmann on Cole, "Cole is a great young man that has grown up wanting to be a competitor for our high school. He is a rare 3 sport athlete at our school and has excelled at all 3 (Football, Basketball, Baseball). His dad is our weights teacher and serves as an assistant football and baseball coach. Basketball has always been Cole's first love, but he gave everything he had to all the sports. He is one of the best competitors that I have ever coached.

Cole tore his ACL in the 2nd football game of the year playing quarterback. He was devastated. Although none of us thought it would be possible to play this basketball season, Cole came to every practice and took part in every team activity. He would shoot on the side as he was able. Cole was rehabbing with the goal in mind of playing in substate. He was medically cleared, ahead of schedule, the last Friday of the regular season (our last game was on Thursday). I believe this was less than 6 months after surgery date. Cole was our lone returning starter coming into this season, so we ended up starting 2 sophomores and 2 freshmen at times. We were competitive in almost all our games but had a 6-14 record at the end of the season. We were ahead in the 4th quarter in many of those losses but couldn't finish games because of our inexperience. Cole began practicing during our substate week on Monday. He wasn't near 100% but battled through the physical and psychological discomfort because he wanted to play so badly. It was as emotional of a moment as I've had in coaching when I put him in the game. He scored 16 points (all in the 2nd half) and willed us to a victory over the #1 seed in our substate in the 1st round. We then won our substate and went to state as the #8 seed. Down 1 with 30 secs left against the #1 seed at the state tournament, Cole hit a guarded 3 pointer that ended up winning the game. He gave our team the opportunity to play the weekend at the state tournament. It usually takes athletes time to come back psychologically after returning to competition, but he fought through that (and he wasn't near 100% physically). I am extremely proud of what he did and couldn't have been happier that he was able to play in 5 games his senior year."

For someone who loves sports as much as I do, whether I am playing or sitting at home watching on television, injuries are an aspect of sports that are hard to swallow. I've seen countless injuries, especially involving an individual's knee, and it is difficult to see athletes be taken out of the sport they love. When something of this magnitude happens to yourself, you gain a whole new perspective. This is what happened to me on a Saturday afternoon in September.

Attempting to lead a 2 minute drive to tie up the game, I scrambled out of the pocket looking to make a play when I was to cut out of bounds. This one play became a defining moment in my life. On the cut, I heard a loud pop in my left knee, and instantly, I knew something was wrong. The pain was unlike anything I had previously experienced. Throughout the entire next week, I anxiously awaited the MRI, and the following Friday before our road trip to Abilene, I read the results before anyone else and found out I had a complete tear of my ACL. I instantly worried that my basketball season would be in jeopardy. The trip that day was filled with sincere texts from loved ones and several bouts of tears.

Not long after the realization of what happened, I looked up normal recovery times, and several sites reported it was 6-12 months for recovery, which meant that basketball would be a no-go. Physical therapy began the following Friday, three days after surgery had been done, and it began the most grueling process I had faced in my life. Over the next 12 weeks, I continued to work hard and push myself, but the outlook was still bleak. However, at my 3 month checkup, I noticed the timeline left a small opening that meant basketball was still possible. This forced me to amp up my rehab and push myself as far as I could because I knew how much I would need to improve my strength in order to play. A few days before my final check-up, I passed several tests that had been put in front of me by my physical therapist and surgeon, which meant that against all odds, I was 6 days away from playing my first game of my senior season after the entire regular season had been played.

Game 1 of my basketball season would be played on March 2nd, just 5 months and 10 days removed from surgery. A normal timetable says that at 6 months an athlete is able to resume some physical activity. I was not just resuming physical activity, but I was playing in a postseason basketball game. Luckily, I was able to hit big free throws down the stretch and then help us win the next game for a state tournament berth. In the first round, as the 8-14, eighth seeded team, I was able to hit biggest