

Ava Jones's Story

On July 3rd, 2022 I committed to play basketball at the University of Iowa. Two days later my family and I were struck by a drugged driver while we stood on a Louisville, KY sidewalk looking for somewhere to eat dinner.

Flashback five years earlier...During my 7th grade parent/teacher conference I told my mom and teacher my future plans were to play Division 1 basketball and play in the WNBA. Obviously I wasn't the only kid in middle school who dreamed of playing professional sports, but I was definitely willing to put in the work to make it happen.

After playing middle school basketball at Nickerson, I knew I had the potential to grow as a player, I just needed someone to help develop and push me. In 8th grade, I joined Wheat State Elite basketball club and began playing with girls who were just as determined and focused about basketball as I was. I had coaches who pushed me to grow and we played some of the best teams in the nation.

Back at home, I was lucky enough to play on a great high school team too. My freshman year we were part of the "Forever Four" state basketball teams who had our last two games of state competition cut short due to COVID. And we made another trip to state my junior year, where we ended up 4th place.

I had such a bright future ahead of me. I earned multiple league, county and state honors and still had another year of high school basketball ahead. I began the college recruiting process for the second time. I had recently decommitted from Arizona State due to a coaching staff change and now had the opportunity to talk to and visit coaches and programs all over the country. My mom and dad and I spent spring and the beginning of summer on the recruitment trail.

When I visited the University of Iowa and met the coaching staff and players, I knew that was where I wanted to play, so I committed on July 3rd. The next day we drove to Louisville for the Run for the Roses basketball tournament. We got into town in time to watch the fireworks display. I was excited for the tournament because the Iowa coaches were going to be there.

All excitement was cut short the next day when my family and I were hit by a car. The accident killed my dad who was a teacher and track coach at Nickerson High School and left my mom and myself critically injured. I suffered a traumatic brain injury which affected the use of my right hand, arm and leg and my access to vocabulary and speech. I stayed in the University of Louisville hospital for 2 weeks. Once I was stable enough to move to the rehabilitation center, I spent 6 hours a day in occupational, physical and speech therapy for the next 4 weeks.

When my mom was strong enough to be transported, we headed home to Kansas. By that time school had already started but I didn't start until October.

I continued with all my therapies relying on my grandma driving me to and from Wichita each day. Making matters worse, after an MRI, I learned my shoulder had been separated and all ligaments and menisci were torn in both knees which meant surgeries. After each of the three surgeries I spent time in a wheelchair but worked diligently in physical therapy to walk as soon and safely as possible.

Now, ten months after the accident, the knee surgeries are done, I am walking without crutches but still have the shoulder surgery to go. I won't be winning my second state high jump

championship this year, but I don't know if I would have wanted to compete without my dad as my coach. He has left a big hole at Nickerson High School and in our family too.

I am so thankful the University of Iowa is still honoring my basketball scholarship and giving me two redshirt years to recover and train. It is unknown if I'll ever fully recover, but I am just as determined to play DI basketball now as I was in 7th grade.