

New Mexico Activities Association Student-Athlete Spotlight



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Hobbs' Dean Draws Inspiration from Tragedy

By Tyler Dunkel, Sports Information Director at the NMAA

Swimmer Cory Dean of Hobbs High School draws his inspiration from an unlikely source - tragedy. Last year, Dean's best friend and teammate Tori Kleinsteuber passed away following a long battle with cancer. During her battle, Kleinsteuber's motto was "Never Give Up" and Dean has continued to carry that on in her memory.

"The saying 'Never Give Up' really speaks for itself," Dean said. "It means a lot to me to try and carry on that same type of attitude Tori had during her fight with cancer. I think what we try to do is really carry on the true meaning of that motto, which is that there is more to life than just swimming."

Dean says the entire event surrounding Tori's battle with cancer has changed his whole perspective on the way he looks at life. "The whole experience of Tori battling cancer really changed my thought process on life. I went from having a very narrow minded outlook on life to realizing that there is just so much more if you just open your eyes and see everything that is out there. We need to find happiness in everything."

He continued by reflecting on a time that he went and visited Tori at her home. "I remember finding out that they were placing her in hospice during her last few months, so my friend Josh and I just blew off practice to go to her house to spend time with her. She really couldn't talk to us because of the medication but just the funny hand signals she was making as we were talking to her were making us laugh. It just made me realize that life is just too short and to look at things from a broader scope."

Debbie Dean, Hobbs' swimming and diving head coach (and Cory's mom) agreed that Tori's battle has made her son a better person. "Cory is able to recognize it's not all about him. There is so much going on in high school and kids don't always recognize that actions have consequences. She forced everyone to grow up and to realize that it's not about me, it's about the greater good."

Tori passed away January 12, 2014 in Hobbs, but Dean has used her "Never Give Up" attitude in his own life by becoming a mentor to younger kids in the Hobbs area through the Eagle Buddy Program, a program that stemmed from a high school football player who decided to take a stand against elementary school bullying.



Other students joined in and now all Hobbs High School students are encouraged to buddy up with an elementary school student who is bullied.

"Throughout my life I have always had great mentors who have shown me not necessarily right from wrong but showed me the bigger picture," Dean said. "So it was my goal to do the same for some of the younger kids I have a chance to impact. It's funny how things work out in life. We all go through tough times in our lives in one way or another and it's important to be able to show the younger kids that there is a light at the end of the tunnel and that they are not alone. Helping others look at situations from a different point of view will help change their lives."

He continued by saying, "The Eagle Buddy Program here at Hobbs High School tries to match up some of the older students with younger students that are having a hard time at school or at home. It's our job to really just be a friend. The seventh grader I'm buddies with was just having a hard time fitting in and really it was a case of other kids thinking he was different. But after hanging out with him at his school and having lunch it really made the other kids realize that he isn't that different. I think we helped him build some confidence and come out of his shell. Sometimes these kids just need a friend to help them feel good about themselves."

Coach Dean continued by saying, "I listen to Cory talk to his Eagle Buddy and you can tell he has a real heart for wanting to help. Cory told me he felt that Tori was talking through him."

Dean, a captain for the Hobbs swimming and diving team, has been a competitive swimmer for just over 10 years. The 2015 Streamline SwimStore State Swimming and Diving Championships, presented by Farmers Insurance Group, will be his fifth NMAA state competition.

"I started swimming when I was nine years old and it has been like a second family," he said. "I have developed great relationships with people and those have continued through the years. My favorite thing about the sport of swimming is that you don't have to deal with people's opinions. Your time is right there in black and white; you're either the fastest or you're not. It makes it much simpler that way."

Dean also swam for the Junior Olympics, earning five gold medals. Currently, Dean competes in the 50-freestyle, the 100-freestyle, the 200 IM and the 100 butterfly.

"Swimming in the Junior Olympics was kind of a last minute thing we put together. Myself, along with another teammate actually joined up with two other swimmers from West Texas and we ended up winning every relay in the competition. It was a great experience, one that I won't forget."

He feels that his experience in the Junior Olympics has pushed him to be a better swimmer. "I think swimming in the Junior Olympics really helped me build more confidence in the pool. So much of sprinting is mental and that experience made me a much tougher swimmer mentally. It also propelled my training efforts to the next level."

In 2013, Dean was a member of the 200 medley relay team that won the state event. He reflected on that moment. "On a scale of 1-10, winning the 200-medley relay at the state swimming and diving meet in 2013 was a 22. It was something my relay teammates had been training for our whole lives. We had two seniors on that relay team and the other two, myself included, were sophomores. After finishing fifth my freshman year we knew that 2013 was going to be our year to win it and become state champions. It was a goal of ours for the entire year. It meant the world to us to finally accomplish that goal."

Coach Dean says that Tori was the boys' inspiration for winning the state title, "Tori never concentrated on her cancer. She always told the boys to focus on their goal. She put the state meet in perspective for them. She humbled them and told them to just get out there and do what they're here to do. The boys did it for Tori."

Dean serves on the Executive Board for National Honor Society at Hobbs High School, while carrying all advanced placement classes. This spring, Dean will graduate as an honors student with 38 college credit hours and a 3.2 GPA. He plans to attend Florida Atlantic University in the fall.

“Education is everything and it’s the path to other things in your life,” Dean said. “I take my school work very seriously because I know without a college degree I might not have as many opportunities. My family really stressed the importance of education early in life.”

No matter where Dean ends up in life, he will continue to follow Tori’s example of “Never Give Up.” It’s what drives him to be a better swimmer, a better student and a better person.

“Despite going through her battle with cancer, Tori always showed pure kindness,” he said. “She never stopped caring about other people, even during her worst times. They always say that the worst things happen to the best people and I know that sounds real cliché but no one could have handled it better than Tori did. She was an inspiration to all of us and she continues to be an inspiration.”