

New Mexico Activities Association Student-Athlete Spotlight



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ADVERSITY NEVER STOPPED RUNYAN FROM DREAMING BIG

By Jason Groves

Derek Runyan is accustomed to success.

The Cliff High senior has a laundry list of rodeo accomplishments and is a three-year starter on the small school powerhouse boys' basketball team.

Runyan has his entire life ahead of him. He hopes to attend New Mexico State University on a rodeo scholarship. But, one day, Runyan will look back at his junior year as a standout year full of adversities overcome.

"I never knew how it was going to work out," Runyan said. "I just knew that it would go away and I would be back to normal one day and it did."

Runyan qualified for the National High School Rodeo Finals in team roping and was the 2015 state all-around champion. He was also a starter in the backcourt for Cliff's 2015 Class A state championship team that went 28-2 and won the school's 11th blue trophy.

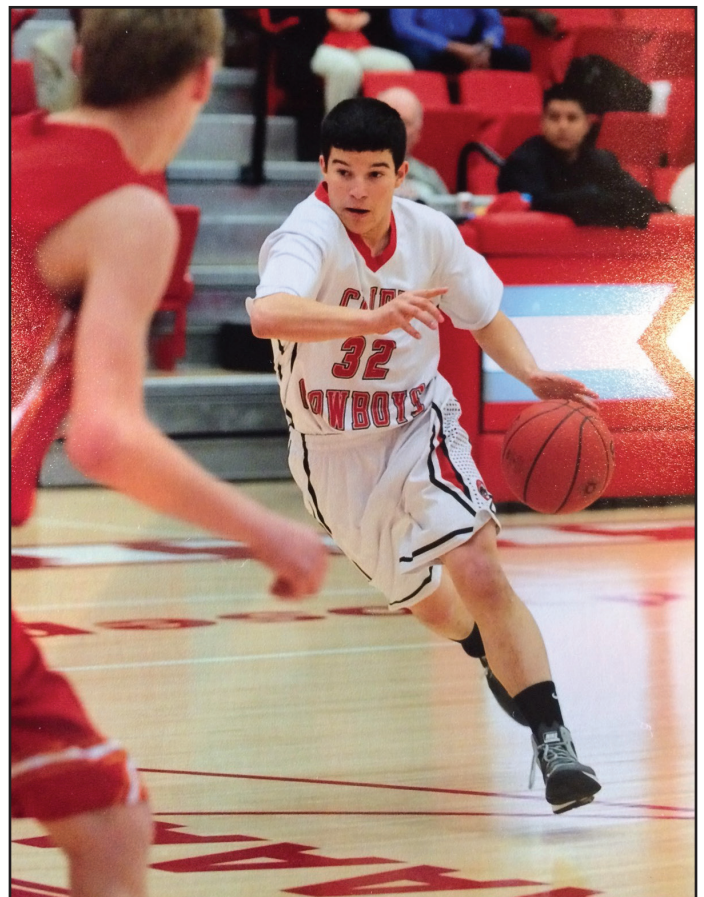
The list of accomplishments may have never happened had a mysterious illness not faded.

During the summer basketball camp season prior to his junior year, Runyan complained about ankle pain. Injury was foreign to Runyan, who works for his father's business, Runyan Construction, when he is not at school or in the gym.

"At the time I didn't realize how serious it was," Runyan said. "Looking back at it, I realize that it could have been career ending for a lot of my sports. I don't like to get down about a lot of stuff so I was trying to stay positive about it. I never got mentally down about it."

The pain turned to swelling throughout his body, which was enough to sideline him for the better part of four months.

"It was scary for a period of time," Cliff High basketball coach Brian Shock said. "He didn't complain but just said his ankles felt funny. I'm just thankful he was healthy and finally able to play. He really persevered through some tough times and finally overcame it. It was a scary time for everyone."



Runyan's family traveled to the El Paso Children's Hospital and even a specialist in Phoenix, trying to come up with answers on why the mystery illness came and went.

"They told us it would possibly never come back," said Linda Runyan, Derek's mother. "It was very frustrating as a parent not knowing what caused it and what settled it. It was very frustrating because you would think they would be able to find something."

Runyan turned the corner prior to his junior year.

He developed into a defensive stopper in the backcourt for the Cliff boys' basketball team that defeated Hondo Valley 48-36 in the state title game.

"In the second part of the summer, doctors found the right medication and I started feeling better before the National High School Finals so I was able to go do that," Runyan said. "I didn't get back to normal until maybe a week before school started."

Shock has a long relationship with the Runyan family. He worked for Runyan Construction while he grew up in Cliff and played basketball for his father, Pete Shock, before replacing him as head coach three seasons ago.

"When I worked for Bryan, I learned a lot of skills from him," Shock said. "Derek was a baby around the office so I kind of watched him grow up."

Derek is one of four brothers who all played basketball at Cliff and participated in rodeo.

"It's normal for kids around here to play basketball and rodeo, but maybe not normal for the rest of the world," Derek's father, Bryan said. "They kind of complement each other. Basketball keeps him in shape for rodeo and rodeo does the same to play basketball. It takes a lot of coordination and skill."

Derek is the youngest of the siblings, following Tyson, Bryce and Cody. Cody Runyan won a state basketball championship in 2010.

"My brothers and I are always competitive," Runyan said. "We usually compete in practice to make each other better."

Without illness to slow him down, Derek is looking to make 2015-16 even better, but 2015 will always stand out to Derek and his family. He is currently leading the New Mexico High School Rodeo Association All-Around standings after one event and he's back in the gym working on his basketball game.

"They all mean a lot to me but probably my national accomplishments, the all-around state championship and the roping championship mean the most," Runyan said.

Derek's junior year proved to his family that you can't take any success, big or small, for granted.

"We were very blessed that he could accomplish all of that," Linda Runyan said. "As a parent, you worry about it coming back or maybe too much physical stress setting it off. Last year did mean more because at any given time, you don't know what is going to happen."