



# New Mexico Activities Association Student-Athlete Spotlight

## Underbrink Makes Comeback after Car Crash

By Matthew Asher

April 17, 2014 started out like any other day for Andrew Underbrink. He went to school at Portales High, where he was a member of the junior varsity basketball team and a top-ranked golfer in the state of New Mexico. But everything changed for him and his sister Kaity on the ride back home.

Following his golf practice, as he was driving down Baseline Road, Andrew came to a bend in the road and saw a dog run in front of the truck. He swerved to avoid the animal but the passenger side front tire fell off the axle.

"The tire shot off," Andrew said. "I lost control and the truck rolled four or five times and stopped when the roof was on the road."

His sister had fallen out of her seatbelt and was lying on the roof. He was still in his seat belt but his left leg was pinned under the truck.

"I found out later both of our cell phones had flown out of the truck during the flips," Andrew said. "So there was no way to call for help."

With a punctured lung and his left eye swollen shut, Andrew wisely turned off the truck and held onto the horn until Zully De La Torre, a friend and neighbor, came by about 20 minutes later and called 911 and Andrew's parents.

Both Andrew and his sister were airlifted to the Lubbock hospital and were in the ICU for five days. Kaity suffered a small shoulder fracture, broken right wrist and bruised lungs. Andrew had a punctured lung as well as a bruised chest. Despite being pinned down by the truck, Andrew miraculously only suffered major bruising on his leg.

"I thought once the EMT's moved the truck that his leg would be butchered," Scott Underbrink, Andrew's father said. "He's lucky it was just bruised."

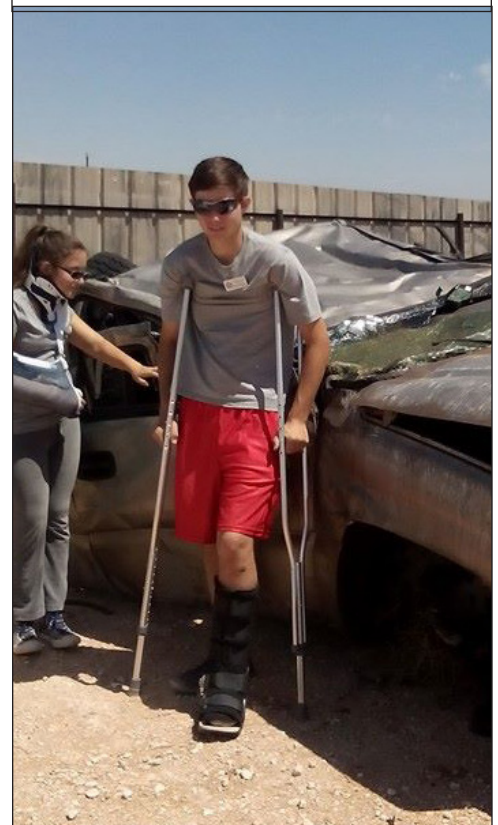
With the punctured lung, Andrew had to have a tube inserted to help him breathe during his stay in the hospital.

"They saw some spots and air bubbles in my lung because it wouldn't re-inflate," Andrew said.

On his fourth day in the hospital he was doing well enough that he was allowed to try to stand up and put pressure on his left leg. He couldn't do it. Rather than force anything, the hospital gave him a pair of crutches and told to simply let it heal.

"Every day I had to ice my leg," Andrew said. "Along with rest and elevating it for a couple of weeks."

Andrew was finally released from the hospital on April 22. His father drove him to Roswell to surprise his golf team as they were competing in a tournament that day.



“It was a big surprise because I didn’t even know if I was going to leave the hospital that day,” Andrew said. “I still had the tube in my throat that morning and the doctors didn’t know if I would be okay once they took the tube out.”

While Andrew was thrilled to see his teammates, he knew he wouldn’t be able to play with them until he was much better.

“It crushed him that he couldn’t compete for the rest of the season,” Scott said.

The good news for Andrew was the relative lack of serious injuries.

“Once they said it was a bruised leg and it would take a few months to get back my strength, I knew I’d be able to play again,” Andrew said.

He was eventually given a boot to help with the swelling and took two entire weeks off before returning to school. Once he returned, it was his basketball coach, Randy McBroom, who started his physical training regimen.

The rehab included lots of short distance sprints and back and forth moves, like the cone drill, with some minor amounts of weight training added.

“We spent a lot of time working on his agility,” McBroom said. “His mobility was limited and we didn’t want another injury on something we could prevent so I had to make sure he didn’t push himself too hard.”

Once Andrew got into the habit of his daily exercises, his determination continued to improve as he looked forward to the end result of being able to play basketball and golf once more.

“It was painful, but I could see everyday progress,” Andrew said.

Starting in the summer months, Andrew was finally allowed to play basketball again and McBroom let Andrew play in some summer games with the Portales varsity basketball team and was amazed at his progress.

“There was so much improvement from the very beginning,” McBroom said. “It was like night and day from when he started to just a few months later.”

While nothing has been made official, McBroom is open to the idea of promoting Andrew to the varsity squad during the basketball season if he continues to play at his current level.

Even with the good news, Andrew knows how lucky he is just for the opportunity to play sports again.

“It was a scary experience,” Andrew said. “I knew we had God on our side. We were unbelievably blessed to survive this ordeal.”