

New Mexico Activities Association Student-Athlete Spotlight

Positivity Helps Daniel through Tough Time

By Tyler Dunkel, NMAA Sports Information Director

Kyler Daniel, a senior at Raton High School seemed to be on track to have a successful high school football career for the Tigers until the third game of his sophomore season changed his path.

It was in the third quarter of the game against Aztec. Daniel was at the bottom of the pile after making a tackle when his ankle was rolled over, rupturing the tendon in his ankle, forcing it to dislocate. The doctors felt that his injury would heal by itself and he was placed in a cast for six weeks.

“My first thought after being injured was I was devastated. I think the hardest part about all of this for me was that every time I would have a surgery and go through physical therapy and I was ready to rejoin my team, it would happen again. It was hard to just go to a practice or a game and still feel as if I was part of the team. It really had an effect on me.”

After intense physical therapy, Daniel thought he was on the fast track back to the football field until a setback. His ankle started to dislocate again. This time it would happen randomly, especially when his calf muscle would be in a flexed position.

Over the next two and a half years, Daniel endured several surgeries and countless hours of physical therapy in hopes to one day rejoin his team.

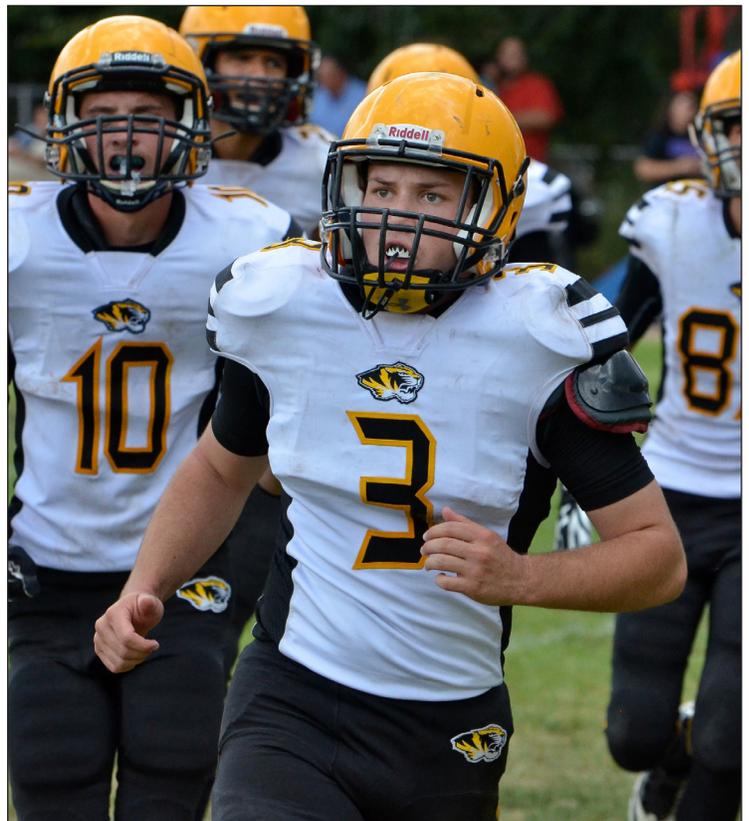
“To get through these last two and a half years, I really had the support of my mom, my family, coaches and teammates. They tried to help me keep a positive attitude to where eventually I would get through it. That is what helped me the most.”

Although he was unable to play, Daniel felt it was important for him to still be with his team on the sidelines at practice and games to show his support, even though it was hard on him emotionally.

“I wanted to continue to be around the team to show support. I felt that maybe in some way I could help my fellow teammates and coaches plus I just love the game of football. Even though it hurt so much it was nice to be a part of the brotherhood on the team and try to help them with their season, even though I couldn’t help them myself.”

Finally, during the summer of 2015, before his senior season, Daniel was given a clean bill of health and was allowed to rejoin his teammates for summer conditioning and fall practice. He explained that he felt a lot of emotions but was just happy to be back on the field.

“To step back onto the field this year, my senior year has been a lot of fun. I had a ton of energy and I was just so grateful for the opportunity to play football again. To fully be a part of the team and participate in practice, workouts and games was great. One of the hardest parts about all of this was watching my friends get to participate and I couldn’t. They still made me feel as part of the team but in the end it wasn’t the same. So, to finally be able to stand side by side



with them on the field was a great feeling.”

He also commented that re-injury of the ankle was something that went through his head before stepping back on the gridiron.

“When I first stepped back onto the field, re-injury was definitely something that crossed my mind and I didn’t want to go through all of that again but once I got going in practice and workouts, I felt more and more comfortable and confident that I was healed. I knew the importance of going hard every play and as I took more reps I began to build confidence.”

Daniel feels that he has learned some very important life lessons over the last few years about having a positive attitude and had this to share with other going through the same situation: “I would like to tell others that are going through the same thing to stay positive, even though it might not look like it will ever get better. If you keep a positive attitude, you will eventually get through it. Also, keep in mind that you have other things going for you in your life besides sports, like family, friends and your education.”

The silver lining in all of this was that even though Daniel was unable to play football, he was able to focus on his academics during that time and is currently ranked No. 1 in his class.

“I feel my grades are very important. Football isn’t going to affect me in the future like my education will. I knew that in my degree path, my academics need to be strong. I just felt that I needed to keep my grades up throughout these last few years because it was what I still had going for me.”

He plans to attend the University of New Mexico and earn a degree in mechanical engineering and enter the aerospace field and possibly build and design aircrafts.