



New Mexico Activities Association Student-Athlete Spotlight

Walker has the Heart of a Tiger

By Tyler Dunkel, NMAA Sports Information Director

Kayden Walker, a junior at Los Lunas High School lives, dreams and breathes basketball. If you ever have a chance to sit down and speak with him you better be ready to talk hoops because it's always on his mind. Several years ago, his most cherished activity was almost taken from him when he was diagnosed with Supraventricular Tachycardia.

In 2010, Walker started complaining that his heart felt "weird." An EKG report found that his heart rhythm was very fast and a little irregular. Based on EKG, his family made an appointment to see a cardiologist.

In March of 2010, Walker had his first visit with the cardiologist and was told he had Supraventricular Tachycardia with episodes of palpitations. The doctor prescribed a beta blocker for Walker and advised he could still play in sports and remain active. While on the medication Walker was very fatigued (a side effect of the medication) and unable to remain fully active.

Walker explained that a positive attitude is what got him through the tough times. "Through this whole thing I really had to keep a positive attitude. I knew I would get through this but I had to be patient. It was, at times, frustrating. At first I thought it was bad but as it continued it made me stronger."

When engaging in activities, no matter how hard he worked, the medication would not allow his heart rate to go over 60 beats per minute. This, however, did not stop Walker from doing what he loved-basketball. No matter how tired he was, he still went out every game and gave his all and left what he had on the court.

Walker commented on being scared and the thought of losing the ability to play basketball. "I was scared at first and thought it was going to keep me from playing basketball. As we spoke to more and more doctors I realized that after some of the surgeries, I would be okay. All I wanted to do was get back on the basketball court. It took me some time to get back but once I was cleared to play I felt fine. Sometimes I feel it coming back but the doctor said that would happen from time to time."

He continued by saying, "My parents were very nervous about me continuing to play basketball, but after speaking with some of the doctors they felt better about it and knew I would be okay."

In May of 2010, his family arranged another appointment with the doctor because the medication Walker was on was not controlling the symptoms of his condition. In fact, the symptoms were getting worse. After careful consideration of all the pros and cons a decision was made to try an ablation procedure to see if this may help his condition.

That June, Walker underwent the ablation procedure. The doctors told Walker he had a few areas in his heart that were creating his issues and they believed that they had fixed it. Two weeks after the procedure, Walker had to go to the emergency room at the University of New Mexico Hospital because of other problems related to his heart. After being



released from the hospital, Walker visited the cardiologist and was informed that they had no idea what was happening but that Walker needed to return for regular checkups every six months. Over time, his symptoms subsided and for a period of time they completely disappeared.

Then in the summer of 2014, Walker started getting symptoms of his condition again. At times his heart rate would go up to 270 beats per minute. Following another visit to the doctor, he was told his problem had returned. They placed him on a take home heart monitor to keep an eye on him and his condition.

Walker hated the monitor because he was required to wear it at all times, and when something was going awry in his heart, it would make a very loud noise that was noticeable by those around him. The doctors decided to put Walker back on the beta blockers to see if that would control his symptoms.

Walker decided that the medication was affecting him too much and he stopped taking it. He said that when he was on the court everything appeared to be in slow motion. After another appointment with his cardiologist, his family found out that his doctor was no longer in their network. The Pediatric Cardiology Associates of New Mexico said they had a doctor that came to Albuquerque once a month from Phoenix. His first appointment was in December of 2014 and the doctor decided Walker needed another ablation procedure.

Walker went to Phoenix in March of 2015 and just a week after the procedure the same symptoms appeared again. The family then contacted the Heart Hospital of New Mexico and made an appointment to see a doctor and was told he needed another procedure. The surgery was scheduled for June of 2015. Walker had the procedure on his heart and the doctor said that it was the longest surgery he had ever done for this problem. Thankfully, since then, Walker has had no recurring episodes.

He said that sometimes his coaches and others worry about him but that he tries to explain that everything is going to be fine, "Most people don't even know what I went through but I try to explain to them that everything is okay now and not to worry."

Throughout the entire process, Walker's main concern has been how his condition would affect his ability to play sports. All of the surgeries had been scheduled around his games and practices. His main concern was not for himself, but for his team and coaches. He has never let this slow him down or used it as a crutch. In fact, this has made him stronger and work harder.

"I'm just looking forward to the season. In years past I was never really fully healthy and I would try my best. But I think this year I'll be ready to compete at a top level and help my team win."

Walker hopes to attend a four-year college and play basketball but understands that his basketball career won't last forever and knows that his academics will carry him further in life.

"My academics are very important to me because my education will allow me to do the things I want to after high school and college. I would like to do something in the medical field, like a doctor, dentist or a nurse. I think that my experiences could really help me help others."