

Jacob Quade - What Being Tall Means to Me

For most of my life, being tall has always been a prediction. I was told that I would stand out, that I would eventually be the one everybody asked for help when they needed something off the highest shelf. But as I've reached that point, I'm able to look back and realize the implications my physical growth has had on my mental and emotional development. As a distance runner, being tall hasn't always worked to my advantage. I carry much more weight than the average athlete I compete against, and I've been much more likely to get injured than most. The biggest result of my increased injury risk has been my dealings with Osgood-Schlatter disease, an overuse injury felt right below the knee in fast-growing athletes. The faster I grew, the worse the pain got, and it was enough to severely limit my training during my sophomore year. I was only able to run about half of my training days, and I didn't see any noticeable improvements from my freshman to sophomore year, which is when most high school runners see their biggest jump. When I couldn't run, I spent countless hours training on the same elliptical, alone and with no definitive path to a full return. After my sophomore year, however, my pain went away and I was able to run every day for the first time in over a year. I was finally able to take the mental fortitude I gained from my long path through injury and use it in training, racing, and as a team captain. Over my junior and senior years, I've finally seen the improvements I expected as an underclassman, as I've become a key piece in multiple teams finishing top-3 in our state and qualified for regionals as an individual. I've helped many of my teammates going through injury emotionally and with physical tips on how to manage pain while still running as much as possible. My appreciation for training and competing has grown, and I get compliments from coaches and parents who say they love to watch my effort and heart when racing.

Although Osgood-Schlatter disease is the major injury I've had, I have suffered many others that have slowed or halted my training anywhere from a couple days to a few months. Naturally, with all the injuries I've experienced, I have tried to self-diagnose through research, diagrams, and lots of websites. My time investigating how my muscles, tendons, and ligaments have malfunctioned has greatly influenced my love for anatomy and physiology, and it has led me toward my major choice of exercise science. My injuries, and my subsequent research, have given me the background to know that I'll enjoy the classes I'm taking and the careers I'll be able to choose from afterward. My ultimate goal is to go into research, ideally researching cardio-based sports such as running and cycling. I'll be able to research performance optimization, injury risk factors and treatments, and many other categories that I'm already interested in now. I might even be able to perform studies on how being tall affects all of these topics. My height has shaped my character, interests, and future plans, and I'm excited to see how it continues to do so in the coming years. I expect it to continue to shape me physically and mentally (although hopefully not too much more physically, or else I might start hitting my head on doorframes), and I'll embrace it doing so while still getting stuff off the highest shelf for my shorter counterparts.