

Success is Not a Coincidence: My Wrestling Experience

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A personal response to Kyle Maynard's book, No Excuses, The True Story of a Congenital Amputee

This November I read Kyle Maynard's No Excuses, The True Story of a Congenital Amputee, for a book project in my English class. My teacher Bill Barron strongly encouraged me to read this story. Mr. Barron is also the varsity wrestling coach at Hyde School in Bath, Maine where I currently attend. I was immediately interested in the book because like Kyle, I too am a congenital amputee. I was born missing my right hand.

It was almost the end of the fall team and football season was coming to an end. I was signed up to play basketball in the winter. After reading Kyle's book, I knew I had to switch to wrestling. I had always been athletic since I was a young child, playing football, ice hockey, and baseball, but this story was inspiring enough for me

to realize I had not conquered the demon within, which was preventing me from reaching my personal best in athletics and in life. I spoke to Mr. Barron about switching to wrestling and he indicated he would speak to the athletic director on my behalf. I was excited to try something new, but I was also nervous that I would not like the sport and would regret this decision.

Our first wrestling practice was at 10 o'clock the night we all came back from Thanksgiving break. Quite frankly, it was not enjoyable. It was mostly a lot of cardiovascular exercise. It was pretty apparent that our team was out of shape. The coaches decided that because we were not in shape, we needed to all show up to the gym at 5:30 each morning and work out until we were in shape. We did those morning work-outs all week. After that week, I

was placed on the JV squad. Our first match was that Saturday at Morse High School for the Brian Westlake Wrestling Tournament. We were in the JV section of it and each of us had one match. Mine was against a kid from Mount Ararat High School with good wrestling experience. I walked on the mat nervously, not knowing what to expect and hoping I would not lose. Unfortunately, I was pinned in 34 seconds. Yet I was quick to put that match behind me and move on. I thought it was only my first match and that it did not mean anything. So I went to practice next week and worked hard for my next match at Northfield Mount Hermon in Northfield, Massachusetts. That week I

Eric Cortellessa pinning Erik Brault at the Hyde JV Tournament.



paid close attention to the coaches to learn the most moves possible. That Saturday I went 1-2, losing two by pin. My morale was down and I felt defeated. I went home later that week for winter break.

During the break I did not work out or call any of my teammates, as is the expectation of a Hyde wrestler. By the end of the break, I had gained a couple pounds and was not looking forward to two more months of wrestling, seeing that I was not winning my matches. When I came back from break, I was out of shape and my overall attitude had regressed. My advisor Ross Sanner, a four-year Hyde graduate who has returned to teach, could immediately see through my attitude, as he had been there himself. He told me that I needed some time to clear my head, so I was assigned maintenance work around campus for three days to think about my attitudes and to devise a means for improving my outlook so I could move forward from this slump. Hyde calls this process "character growth."

When I did return, I was more ready than ever to improve on the mats. After each practice I would talk to my coaches about what I could improve on and what I needed to focus on doing or not doing. I worked hard all week in preparation for a tough match that Saturday, a JV tri-meet against Phillips Andover and Phillips Exeter at Andover, Massachusetts. Though I had been working hard in practice and was consistently doing all I could to improve, I lost both of my matches that day by pin. At the end of the day, I spoke with JV coaches Joseph Bell and John Chesterton about my frustration with how bad habits

were costing me matches. They could sense both the aggravation in my voice and my eagerness to improve. They told me to keep doing what I was doing and good things would come in time.

In practice, I maintained the same routine, working my tail off with my wrestling partner Erik Brault, who would push me in practice because of his strength and experience. After another two weeks of wrestling, where we wrestled against Deerfield Academy and a tri-meet the Massabesic High School and Noble High School, I was still losing my matches by putting myself in bad positions. Thinking back, I remembered Kyle's story of how he was not winning either in his first year of wrestling. If I were to give up or be discouraged now, I would be a coward. Thus I kept the same hard work ethic and positive learning attitude, asking my coaches everyday what I needed to do to improve.

Now, I am under the belief that there are no coincidences in life. The next week our star fourth-year wrestler Matt Fisher, the varsity captain, was out for a week due to illness. Coach Barron told me I would be filling in for Fisher, because I had been displaying a great attitude and work ethic. He believed I would go on out on that mat, and no matter what, give it everything I had. He believed in my potential as a wrestler and as a person. I trained all week with varsity for our tri-meet against our sister school Hyde School - Woodstock and Worcester Academy at Worcester Academy in Worcester, Massachusetts. I was scheduled to have three matches, one against Woodstock and two against Worcester. Although I went 1 and 2 that day, I main-

tained my discipline and fought hard in the two losses, then won the Worcester JV match, all of which was quintessential for the new direction of my season.

After the match, we had a team dinner at a teammate's home in New Hampshire. At this time I had an eye-opening conversation with the two varsity coaches, Bill Barron and Logan Kidwell. Each of the coaches pointed out that I had a great potential as a wrestler but before I could be a champion on the mat, I had to conquer myself. Coach Barron said to me: "What impresses me is that you do not see yourself as a person of limitations. You try your hardest, but you have yet to conquer the force inside of you. Before you can go out and battle your opponents on the mat, you must battle yourself first."

"It's natural for people to doubt me because of my appearance, but the limits others place on me often become a burden. Even as a child, I understood the importance of credibility. So I make it a point to always show who I am by actions and not simply by words, to back things up instead of making false promises. That way people can take heart and believe in me." — Kyle Maynard, Chapter 5, No Excuses

That next Wednesday my school hosted the Hyde School JV Tournament, one of the longest running Junior Varsity tournaments in New England. There were 16 other public schools there from all over Maine. It was a round-robin tournament. I was scheduled to have three matches and one was against a top-ten nationally ranked female wrestler. I decided after my inspiring conversation with Coach Barron and Coach Kidwell that I was going to enter all of my matches with a different mentality. I was not going to be nervous, nor was I going to worry about being put on my back or if the other kid had more experience; I was just going to try my best. If any of my opponents doubted me my because of my appearance, like Kyle I would prove them wrong and make sure they would not forget the time they wrestled Eric Cortellessa. I won all of my matches that day and was named Tournament Champion for the 145-pound weight class.

Through my wrestling experience, I have learned a lot about myself and the way I am going to live the rest of my life, using the "No Excuses" way of living: to take what most people would say is a disadvantage, learn to use it as a strength, and to be grateful for what God has given me. My wrestling experience has taught me that I am my own guide; if I can be a champion in wrestling, I can be a champion in life. 🏆

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