

Jablonski in 'amazing situation' with Kings 10 years after accident

Talks gift from Ovechkin, Travis Roy's inspiration after being paralyzed with NHL.com



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MINNEAPOLIS -- Jack Jablonski is a busy man.

The 26-year-old, who has been paralyzed from the chest down since fracturing two vertebrae and severing his spinal cord when he was checked from behind and went head-first into the boards during a Minnesota high school hockey game on Dec. 30, 2011, is an advocate for people with spinal cord injuries.

He's also running the Jack Jablonski Foundation, a charitable organization he created a year after his accident to advance paralysis recovery treatments through research. Additionally, he's the associate digital media content specialist for the Los Angeles Kings.

Jablonski was honored for his charitable and advocacy work as the MassMutual Community Hero of the Game during the 2022 Discover NHL Winter Classic between the Minnesota Wild and St. Louis Blues at Target Field on Jan. 1. It's part of MassMutual and the NHL honoring those who are making a positive impact on society, the unsung heroes who give back to the game, their families and their communities.

"[I have] aspirations to get into hockey operations one day, but this is an amazing situation I'm in right now [with the Kings]," Jablonski said Friday. "If you would've asked 10 years ago when I was in the hospital where I'd see myself or where I'd be in 10 years, I definitely would not have been able to picture a better situation than I'm in right now."

Jablonski continues to work and inspire. In a Q&A with NHL.com, he talked about his health, his job and who inspires him.

First of all, how are you doing?

"I'm doing really well. Originally, I was told I was likely not going to move the left side of my body and I'd be lucky to bend my right arm. And within a week I was proving the doctors wrong. To this day, I have function and movement in both of my arms.

"I'm able to do a lot in terms of being independent in some ways but most importantly, I've been able to stay healthy in the 10 years that I've been in this situation, stay active, do therapy, continue to get stronger and take advantage of the muscles and the function I do have. I'm good, mentally good and the 10-year anniversary was [Thursday]. Emotional, but a lot to be proud of and a lot to look back and know what I've accomplished in those 10 years."



How did working with the Los Angeles Kings come about?

"I started full time with the L.A. Kings in January of 2020, so I graduated from the University of Southern California in December of 2019. I had interned for the Kings for the previous four years as a podcasting contributor and analyst for them in media. And then once I graduated, I became a full-time employee for the Kings in January 2020.

"It's probably been about a year since I've been in this position and I love it. It's been an awesome opportunity to kind of work on what I do, and know best, which obviously is talking hockey and writing about the sport and interviewing our players and prospects and people around the NHL. At the same time, I also learn a lot about other things. I run our website, I'm in charge of all of our written content on our website, as well as doing a social media video web series called 'Tradin' Jabs.' Kind of all over the map, a lot of Swiss army-type of things, but it's been a blast. Obviously building on what I know and learning what I didn't necessarily know before I got into this world."

Would you like to do any analyst work on TV or radio in the future?

"Yeah, it's something I've been intrigued by and would definitely like to try out, whether it would be working as color commentator, an in-between [periods] analyst, or personality for [the] LA Kings on TV in some fashion or another. Who knows what's to come in the future but definitely something I want to try or experience."

What's a typical day for you?

"I think something with paralysis that people don't necessarily know or realize is, when you have a disability like this, everything in life kind of has to be planned out because you have things that you have to attend to medically throughout the day every single day. For me, I have to wake up two and a half hours before I'm ready for the day because I have to deal with medical stuff and shower and stuff like that. It's not just hop in the shower and five minutes later I'm dressed, because everything takes longer. That's something that's not necessarily realized by the public is that everything has to be planned out, everything takes longer.

"For me to be functional throughout the day, I have to plan out when I can do my medical stuff, get help, who's going to feed me, stuff like that. It's awfully scheduled but at the same time, I'm just happy to live as normal a life as possible. We're talking wake up a few hours early to get ready for the day, then we have a few hours of therapy, go into work or work from home, then afterward maybe have a social life or watch the Kings games at Crypto.com [Arena] or watching from home and running our website and updating it live throughout the games."



You've inspired so many people. Who inspires you?

"The first person is the late Travis Roy (1975-2020). He was injured at Boston University 26 years ago (Oct. 20, 1995). After my injury he reached out to me, and he and I connected and talked a lot. He and I were working together with our foundation to raise money in the future and with his passing, that's not going to happen with them shutting their foundation down soon. He's a big inspiration and kind of a mentor that I was fortunate to get to know and talk to quite a bit. The way he handled everything after his injury was the perfect example to model after.

"In terms of inspiration for me, to have so much support after my injury. To be on the news every single week for months straight and having 15 NHL teams visit me in the hospital in 2012 when they were playing the Minnesota Wild, as well as [the] Wild visiting, becoming this public figure in Minnesota hockey, I think that was inspiration enough. I was very fortunate to have that publicity and the positive attitude that everyone latched onto and it was kind of just a stepping-stone to realizing that I have so many people behind me. I'm going to fight this to the end and, obviously, I believe I'll walk again, and I think a lot started with that original support from Minnesota hockey community and the hockey community in Minnesota in general."

What's the best Christmas present you've ever received?

"So, growing up I was a huge Alexander Ovechkin fan and still am to this day. One of my coaches was [the Washington Capitals] skating coach and trainer back when I was injured and soon after my injury for Christmas, I was given a signed Ovechkin helmet. Ovi wrote a message in Russian. I still don't know what it says. I've got to find a translator."

Do you think he breaks Wayne Gretzky's record for most career goals?

"Absolutely. It's not a matter of if, it's a matter of when. I look forward to that day, it's going to be an awesome celebration in the NHL."

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