

by Jack Jablonski



Sound Off

My Hockey Family

Jack Jablonski reflects on how far he's come in the 10 years since his injury

I DON'T REMEMBER THE ACTUAL HIT. I don't remember hitting the boards. But I remember hearing the whistle against the silence of the arena.

As soon as I hit the ice—silence. That's never good.

But in the 10-plus years since then, since that Dec. 30 day in 2011, where a legal hit sent me head-first into the boards and fractured two of my vertebrae, severing my spinal cord, I only hear the cheers.

At the time of my injury I was 16 years old. At that age, I don't think you ever really grasp the severity of an injury that will leave you paralyzed. How could you? It was such a fluke accident in the game you love. But the one thing I did recognize was the immediate support from my hockey family.

It began with my Benilde-St. Margaret's teammates. It was my coaches, the family in the stands, the opposing team. Then, it expanded exponentially. The entire State of Hockey rallied around me. They still do today, lifting me up and giving me the strength to tackle each new challenge and help me celebrate every small step toward me walking again. I cannot thank the Minnesota hockey community enough for not only supporting me, but also the Jack Jablonski Foundation to help us advance paralysis recovery treatments through research.



Breakthrough Research Developing

The Jack Jablonski Believe in Miracles Foundation's focus is now on directing both funding and public attention to stunning new research happening at the University of Louisville that is demonstrating truly breakthrough results restoring voluntary muscle control below the point of injury to the spinal cord with the use of epidural stimulation. Learn more and get involved at jablonskifoundation.org.

It's really just remarkable to witness how a negative moment can be turned into such a positive movement.

But that rally has gone beyond Minnesota. I was so fortunate to have an outpouring of support from around the country. NHL teams, heroes I admired as I had the same dream of one day playing in the NHL (I like to think I've made it there with my work as an associate digital media content specialist with the Los Angeles Kings.) It reinforced my love for hockey, even though I couldn't play like I used to.

And man, do I love the game of hockey. From the first time I stepped on the ice, it's been my first love. But if my injury has taught me anything, it's that while the logistics and skills of the game are bar none, it's the people that make this game so

great. It's the mom and dad who are willing to drop everything to spend a weekend at an out-of-town tournament; it's the volunteer coaches and scoreboard operators; the teammates who make a locker room fun, and the opposition who help you compete. Without the support of my hockey family, I would have been in a very different place mentally and emotionally, so thank you. I cannot say that enough.

As for next steps, I am excited to continue our pursuit of raising money through the foundation for spinal cord injury research. We've made so much progress and have had such a huge impact, it's incredible.

So like I said, 10 years ago there was silence, but today, it's louder than ever in the best way possible. **BHLJ**