



#IdahoStrong Volume 1: Heidi Pearson and her Rimrock Raider's Road to Recovery

Heidi Pearson is not the kind of person to feel sorry for herself. In a time where all of the world seems turned upside down, and bad things have happened to all sorts of people in the outbreak of COVID-19 and its astronomical aftermath, you'd be hard pressed to find someone in the world who hasn't felt a little sorry for himself or herself in the last few months. Like every high school spring sport student-athlete across the state, Heidi watched her senior year of competition disappear. But it wasn't the first time that Heidi had experienced the ability to play taken from her. In June of 2019, Heidi was involved in a car accident that left her unable to walk and poised at the starting line to a long road to recovery. Heidi, who was involved in volleyball, basketball, and track at Rimrock High School, would not be able to compete regularly for the rest of her high school career.

A few days after her accident, Heidi was feeling fatigued from therapy. The doctors were optimistic that she would walk again, but did not sugar-coat the fact that it would take a lot of work. Luckily for Heidi and her triple threat athletic capabilities, she was used to overcoming physical feats. She knew what it took to work hard, and to "get stuff done". That kind of attitude brought her rave reviews from doctors as she underwent further physical rehab at Utah State University, where her primary physician said that he felt confident she would walk again someday.

In the meantime, Heidi returned to her senior year trying to find as much normalcy as possible. She kept her spot on the varsity volleyball team at Rimrock, she stayed involved and active in her community, and she has made big plans to attend Boise State University this fall to study Kinesiology. Through her motivation to help others and work hard, Heidi discovered the story of Nathan Ogden. After suffering a skiing accident in 2001 that left him temporarily a quadriplegic and then another neck-break a few years later, Nathan has used his devastating and life-altering accidents to help others. He has become a motivational speaker, author, and owner of the charity "Chair the Hope" which raises money for wheelchairs given to those in need. Heidi reached out to Nathan, who promptly volunteered to come to Bruneau to speak to the student body at Rimrock. Heidi worked tirelessly running concessions at home basketball games and posting social media campaigns to raise money for Chair the Hope. Heidi set a lofty goal of raising enough money for ten wheelchairs, but shattered that expectation when she raised nearly \$3,000, enough for 26 wheelchairs.

When I asked Heidi what some of her favorite parts were about her high school experience, her answer struck me. As a standout athlete from small town Idaho, her answer didn't include any personal accomplishments or winning big games with her team. It wasn't about

the thrill of competition, the pride in a win, or the confidence that undoubtedly comes with successfully playing three sports. No, what stuck out to Heidi the most about her high school athletics was her experience with track and field because she met the most friends through competition there. “Everyone is friendly, because though you’re competing with others, you’re also competing with yourself because you’re constantly trying to make yourself better.” And so, it seems, to the high school track athletes of Idaho, that everyone understands that intrinsic motivation faced by all competitors. It’s a different kind of competition. “I’ve made more friends through track and field than anywhere else.” You see, pandemics and car accidents and neck breaks can change things for a lot of people. COVID-19 may take away our ability to compete in the spring of 2020, it may prohibit the hard-working seniors from walking across that stage to get their diploma at graduation, and it may alter the everyday life for many of us for years to come. What it can’t take away, though, is our ability to be nice. We can still connect with each other, motivate each other, and be friends to one another. While Heidi wasn’t able to compete in her favorite sport this season- she had worked with her athletic director to be able to compete in her wheelchair according to IHSAA rules- her favorite parts of the sport still remain: friendship, niceness, and “rooting each other on.” Those are things no global disease outbreak or car accident will ever change.

To all of you seniors out there who weren’t able to compete or to walk across the stage at graduation, Heidi has simple advice: focus on the good. “When you focus on the good, the good gets better. I’ve always been a pretty positive person and when I’m with my friends I like to offer different perspective and focusing on what you can do. With graduation, I don’t get to actually do graduation but I get to go onto college and graduate and walk then. I try not to dwell on the negative parts.”

It sounds too simple to be true, but sometimes it really is. There is always a way to be friendly, an opportunity to be nice, and a chance to focus on the good. Thank you, Heidi Pearson, for being an exemplary and inspirational force to be reckoned with. Thank you for being #IdahoStrong.

