Ranay Majji’s leg had been bothering him for a few days this last winter, but he didn’t think anything of it. He had been on vacation and returned to training and as someone accustomed to soreness and injury, he brushed it off and continued competition for his indoor club track season. When it was time to line up for a block start, Ranay took off for his hurdles just like he would every single time he had in his track career. Only this time, after about five steps off of the block, he felt someone had kicked him in the ankle and he fell. He figured it was just a fellow competitor accidentally making contact, so he tried to get back up, but this athlete couldn’t stand up at all. “The ground felt like it was constantly warping underneath me,” recalls Ranay as he tells the story of when he first realized he had torn his Achilles tendon.

Ranay was very shaken up by his injury, as would any very capable athlete who suddenly lost the physical ability to train and compete. In his sophomore season the year before, Ranay was unsatisfied with his performance that was plagued by stress fractures and an inability to compete at his best. He saw his junior year as an opportunity to improve and develop his take his hurdling to the next level. Instead, he was suddenly unable to compete at any level at all. “While I was sad [about the injury] at first, I only saw it as another obstacle that I had to overcome to be able to compete at the level that I want to.”

It’s easy to see just how Ranay carries himself simply over some written dialogue; he speaks with intent and a contagious optimism, with a level-headed approach and a calm demeanor. It’s no wonder that when he made the decision to stay involved with the team and try to volunteer coach, he was well received by his teammates and his fellow coaches. Ranay made the decision to coach after racking his brain for ways to stay involved, move forward, and better himself when he couldn’t physically train. His hurdling coach was only in his second season, so Ranay approached him to see if he would appreciate any help.

Ron Axtman, the hurdles coach at Timberline, appreciated the help indeed. “Ranay’s transition from student athlete to coach was very smooth. He is a gifted athlete in that he understands the mechanics of hurdling very well,” raves Coach Axtman of Ranay’s ability, “He is also a genuine person who communicates well with others.” In discussing what Ranay’s new role would look like, he and his coach both understood that giving his body the time to heal was the first and foremost priority, and that helping with the team would come secondly. Ranay accepted his new role very well, relating with the teammates and building rapport in order to gain respect all while showing even more respect to his teammates to whom he was now giving direction.
In the very short window of competition that Idaho high school track saw this spring, the Timberline Wolves qualified two hurdles for the district tournament in the first meet. Axtman and Ranay decided to qualify all of their athletes, and it was a goal that Ranay accepted and knew the work he’d have to put in to help bring it to fruition. When the COVID-19 crisis hit, Ranay did not choose to feel sorry for himself that another opportunity was taken away. Instead, he was empathetic to his teammates who were now all in the same boat as he was, and developed a new perspective on his love for high school sports. “It really makes you look back and realize that high school sports won’t be there forever and you should make the most of them every single day; always giving it 110% and always pushing for better.” He let his teammates know that he was there to make them better, as well. When the team was unable to formally train, he would give his teammates workouts to complete together virtually, giving them tips and support while they navigated unprecedented times together. One of his teammates who nominated him for the #IdahoStrong campaign said that it was sometimes easier to take advice from Ranay because he’s often more relatable than the other coaches. The mutual respect felt by Ranay and the rest of the team is hard to miss.

“I suspect that Ranay will coach track after he finishes his studies,” says Coach Axtman, “He’s a great young man and he loves track.” The biggest thing that Ranay has learned from coaching is to develop an abundance of patience and to constantly find different ways to explain things. Personally, he took away that if you have a will, you’ll find a way. His injury meant that he couldn’t compete, but he so badly wanted to stay involved and he found out not only how to take on a new role, but to thrive in it. “You should make every moment of high school count. These moments won’t last forever and you should make memories while you can.” Ranay hopes to continue to rehabilitate his injury and compete next season for his senior year. His reflection on this year’s events is very powerful, and something motivating to everyone who encounters him. With the will to improve, the integrity to hang on, and the optimism to move forward, it seems that Ranay is well on his way to overcoming his greatest hurdle yet.

Ranay Majji, an incoming senior at Timberline High School in Boise, used grit and determination to find a new role as a coach after his injury ended his season before it started.