



Photo by Nicole Batista // Text by Saul Tejada and Andrea Betancourt

WRESTLER

Saul Tejada

The hardest battles are given to the strongest warriors

"The seizures started out of nowhere. It was early my eighth grade year when I hit puberty. No one, not even my parents, could figure out what was going on with me. We went to three different neurologists. Initially, I received two incorrect diagnoses which led to the wrong medication and more importantly a lot of wasted time. It was not until we reached the third and final doctor at Nicklaus Children's Hospital that I heard the word that would change the trajectory of my life. That word was Epilepsy. After the initial shock wore off my family and I embarked on a quest for knowledge about my new diagnosis, determined not to let it control my life.

Surgery was the best option. The post surgery recovery was the most difficult. Now, I'm still in rehab. Rehab consists of a potpourri of different therapies. There is the occupational therapy. That took about five months, that therapy was more about honing my hand eye coordination and motor skills. Speech therapy allowed me to finally communicate in ways I thought I had lost forever. My speech is better, although it's not where I would like it to be. Initially, I would forget words in the middle of sentences. I have definitely progressed since then. Physical therapy restored my mobility. I have learned to appreciate the little things, even homework.

Before my surgery, I had a 504 plan on file with the school which allowed me to remain in general education classes. Now, I am allowed to leave class earlier and I receive longer testing time. Most would believe that this ordeal would take a toll on my academic life and my grades would plummet but in reality my grades have never been better.

When I returned to wrestling after being cleared the first time, I had two seizures that same day. The doctors said they were caused by the intense workout and high stress situations I was putting myself in as a wrestler. After three days of talking to my parents, mentor and best friend, I decided to stop risking it, my health is more important than anything else. My best friend visited me twice in the hospital, he said I looked devastated, I was. I was struggling to do ordinary tasks, I was losing hope of a full recovery but I knew I had something huge on my side. I had the overwhelming support of my friends and family.

Even though I can't wrestle anymore wrestling is still a part of my life. I still attend all the meets. I try to jump in and participate as much as possible. After all, wrestling isn't just a sport, it's a way of life. One thing is certain, after everything I've been through it's the lessons I learned on the mat that helped me make it. No matter the size of your opponent it's your desire to defeat him that decides whether you win or lose. Push through the pain. Keep your eyes on the prize. As I emerge on the other end I know I am stronger than epilepsy. Now it's time to move on to the next part of my life."



During one of his last wrestling meets, junior Saul Tejada takes down his opponent with this signature wrestling move. "He was always a strong competitor. You just knew he would get the win once he hit the mat. Watching him compete was riveting to say the least," said junior Gustavo Confresi.





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