

# Reconstructing a Life Beyond the Game:

## A Reflection on Mental Health, Injury, Grief, and Healing

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For as long as I can remember, the baseball field was more than just a place to compete; it was home. The chalk lines, the rhythmic pop of a ball hitting a glove, and the daily grind toward greatness shaped not only my time but also my entire identity. When I earned the opportunity to play collegiately at Cal State Dominguez Hills, it felt like confirmation that every sacrifice had been worth it. Baseball was not merely something I did; it was who I was. My future, my value, and my sense of self were all tightly linked to the sport. Still, I was completely unprepared for what would happen when that foundation collapsed, and for the emotional and psychological battle that followed.

The shift began quietly, without warning, in the form of an opponent I never expected to face myself. Two weeks into the season, while pitching at Grand Canyon University, I tore my labrum and was placed on the injured list for the rest of the year. There was no dramatic stabbing pain, nothing cinematic or heroic. Instead, it appeared quietly, as pitches suddenly refused to obey my commands. After a week of rest, just as my pitching coach ordered, I grabbed a ball at Azusa Pacific University and jogged onto the field to play catch, feeling hopeful. But as I wound up and threw, reality hit harder than any fastball. That familiar, unwelcome jolt shot through my arm, and in an instant, I knew: my season was over. Suddenly, the path I had dedicated my life to was gone, and I was faced with a reality I had never imagined. I had left San Diego a second time to chase this dream. Now, I sat in the dugout, not in a uniform, but in a sling and a fog of confusion, watching the game progress without me. The injury was physical, but the emotional toll revealed itself more slowly. I felt lost, confused, guilty, and increasingly depressed. Every day reminded me of what I could no longer do, and I mentally punished myself for not training harder in the offseason, convinced I had somehow caused this outcome.

The school year passed in a haze, and while I continued rehabbing my shoulder, I clung to the belief that I would come back stronger, reclaim my place, and prove that the injury was only a temporary setback. But at the end of the season, I was called into the coach's office and told that my scholarship was being revoked due to "lack of performance." In that moment, I felt my world unravel, thread by thread, much like the seams of a baseball slowly splitting open under pressure. Everything I had built my identity around disappeared, not gradually but instantly. I was no longer a student-athlete. I was just someone trying to figure out who I was without a glove, a mound, or a jersey.

The loss of baseball, however, was only the start of a series of emotional blows that tested my mental health in ways I never expected. While my athletic identity faded, my personal life was shattered. My father was diagnosed with a brain tumor. My cousin died by suicide. A month later, my grandfather passed away. Grief came not in waves but like a tidal force, intensifying the internal crisis I was already facing. To say I was going through a mental health crisis would be an understatement. Yet despite the overwhelming pain, I felt I could not talk about it. As an athlete and a man, I had been conditioned to push through pain, stay quiet, "figure it out," and never show vulnerability. My grief seemed invisible, unacknowledged, and unsupported. This sense of disenfranchised grief deepened my emotional isolation, leaving me adrift in a psychological rip current. The harder I fought it, the more I sank.

When I returned home, everything familiar felt foreign. The silence, the lack of structure, and the absence of baseball created a void that frightened me. For the first time, I had no direction. Yet, in that darkness, healing began in quiet, unexpected ways. I did not sit down and craft a strategic recovery plan; instead, I followed my instincts and emotions toward outlets that helped me feel again. Art became the first door. I picked up paintbrushes and started working on canvases as if each piece was commissioned. I poured my emotions into every stroke, letting color and texture express feelings I could not yet put into words. There was no scoreboard, no coach, no comparison—just creation. The canvas did not judge me; it held me.


Music quickly followed. I found peace in rhythm, vibration, and sound—elements that helped me reconnect with my body and spirit, free from the burden of expectation. I started DJing, discovering that spinning records gave me a sense of control and presence similar to what pitching once provided. Where I once aimed to command the strike zone, I now controlled tempo, energy, and atmosphere. Music became my new field, my new place to compete, my new way to feel alive.

Letting go of the dreams I once held for baseball was difficult. It was painful, slow, and filled with moments where I questioned myself and my future. However, the transformation that came from that pain became a victory. Through art and music, I rebuilt my identity, not as an athlete defined by performance but as a person capable of growth, passion, creativity, and reinvention. With time, resilience, and consistent effort, those outlets did more than comfort me; they opened doors I never thought possible. Eleven years after losing my role within baseball, I earned the position of official DJ for a Major League Baseball team. In a poetic twist, the stadium that once symbolized the peak of a sports dream became the stage where a new dream was born.

My journey through injury, grief, and emotional hardship taught me that recovery is not a straight line. Healing rarely comes in the form of simple answers or quick fixes. Sometimes it starts with acknowledging that we are broken. Sometimes it develops quietly through creative expression, connection, and time. Most importantly, healing requires us to accept that we are human, vulnerable, imperfect, and capable of change.

What started as the most painful season of my life ultimately laid the groundwork for a new chapter, one grounded in authenticity, emotional awareness, and resilience. The loss I once feared would break me instead pushed me to discover who I was beyond just athletic identity. I am still a competitor, still driven, still committed to excellence, but now my worth isn't tied to a scoreboard. It exists in my passion, my creativity, my ability to endure, and my refusal to give up on myself. The game may have ended, but life did not. Through art, music, love, and perseverance, I have found a new way to step back onto the field, this time on my own terms.

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