

## Overcoming Challenges By Grant Yount

Life comes with many challenges, but for an athlete, an injury can be one of the hardest challenges to face. After working many years towards achieving your athletic goals an injury can be devastating, causing a major setback in your season, or sometimes even ending your career completely. Rodney Smith, The University of Minnesota's running back, has had to deal with many different physical injuries during his career. Although he is one of the greatest running backs in the University of Minnesota's history, rushing for 4053 yards in 51 games and has scored a total of 31 touchdowns, it hasn't been easy. Rodney played football in high school and college and suffered injuries at both schools. In an interview with Rodney we discussed his injuries, how it impacted his daily life, and who helped him overcome this challenging time.

Rodney has played football for the University of Minnesota since 2014. During his time there he stated that he has broken a finger, sprained his ankle, tore his ACL and has had many other strains. According to Rodney daily life with a physical injury after ACL surgery was not easy. During the interview Rodney stated, "I had to crutch around, ask people for rides, walking up and down stairs is tough." When asked who helped him during that time he said, "I had numerous people to help... my teammates, coaches, and my girlfriend who helped me out a lot both mentally and physically. "I asked Rodney if it was harder being injured in high school or being injured in college. Rodney said, "In high school it was a lot harder because insurance didn't pay for me to have physical therapy every day, maybe only two or three days a week and the rest of it was kind of on my own. In college I could go in every day, it was quicker and easier because I had someone 24/7 working with me to make sure I was where I needed to be."

Trainers like Joe Wisniewski from the University of Minnesota help athletes recuperate from injuries and stay in good health. By email he explained that "the approach to an ACL rehab is dependent on whether the injury was isolated to the ACL or if there are any other structures involved. In an isolated ACL injury, physicians provide protocols backed by research and best practices that are followed by the athletic training staff. These tend to encourage early motion and strengthening of the muscles surrounding the knee joint." Rodney has battled back against his injuries and has come a long way, thanks to the support he has had, and is playing some of the best football of his career.

Physical injuries can be tough but sometimes the hardest part of an injury can be staying in good mental health. Rodney also mentioned players can talk to the school's Sports Psychologist if needed. I asked Rodney, which injury was harder, the mental or the physical struggles. According to him, "the physical part is easy because that's what I've been doing for so long, so taking care of myself mentally was tougher for me." Thankfully he says, "Coach Fleck did make sure I traveled with the team after my ACL injury which helped me to still feel a part of the team even though I wasn't on the field." Rodney also said that anyone who is injured should step back from the game to reflect. "Learn who you are without sports because they won't last forever. It is important because you want to find out who you are as a person." These injuries were very hard for him because sports were very important to him and injuries took that away for some time. He says that the best way to overcome mental challenges is to find others to surround yourself with and to find something else you enjoy. Regardless, Rodney says for him, it's still worth it to play football even if he's been injured. "You learn a lot going through tough

things and tough times. You learn a lot from other people and what type of person you are yourself and how you respond to things that happen in your life that are out of your control.”

Currently, Rodney is a six-year senior at the University of Minnesota, he wants to work with young people to positively impact them in the future. I asked Rodney why his team was so successful this year and he said that the players are happy to see others succeed, “when someone scores a touchdown you don’t see anyone not celebrating because they didn’t score, we truly care about one another on and off the field and prepare the best we can every day.” I believe Rodney has a very good message about what to do when things are not going right. Life can be challenging but you should persevere through your challenges because they won’t last forever. While Rodney’s career as a college football player may be coming to an end soon, a new chapter in youth services may just be beginning. Perhaps he will make an even greater impact off the field in the years to come than he has on the field.