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By Dennis Garcia

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ASHEBORO - Perseverance. The will to battle. Never give up. The work must be done. Just Do It. Endless rehabilitation programs. Do what needs to be done in order to play high school sports again.

These are words, terms and mottos to describe Southwestern Randolph High School graduate Jake Gainey who, throughout his athletic career, has battled a total of five kneecap and two knee surgeries since his 8th-grade year.

None have stopped him from battling back and competing in basketball and baseball, two sports he loves. Although the injuries, surgeries and rehabilitation periods have caused Gainey to miss numerous seasons throughout his athletic career, he was able to suit up and play in his final two high school basketball games and went through his entire senior baseball season uninjured, making his mark on Cougars athletics. But really, his hard work, dedication and fight left a mark long before.

For his hard work, dedication and continued fight to get back on the basketball court and baseball field, Gainey was one of four NCHSAA student-athletes who was recently named the recipient of the Tony Simeon Courage Award, which honors individuals who, despite adversity, demonstrated exemplary character and performance resulting in becoming an inspiration to others.

"For me, it symbolizes hard work and dedication for something that I love," said Gainey, who is about to head to N.C. State for Sports Management, Sports Science and Journalism. "Five kneecap and two knee surgeries. A lot of times I could have quit. It's been a blessing to me to just be able to look back and be proud of what I could do and accomplish. How faithful God is, too. He didn't put me through anything I can't handle. I am truly honored to receive the award."

Gainey was first injured in eighth grade and he figured he got his injury out of the way before high school.

"A lot of athletes have some sort of injury throughout their career," Gainey said. "I figured at least I got mine over early."

If only that was the truth. There were, however, many more to follow. In eighth and ninth grades it was the left knee and in 10th grade it was the right knee. That was very concerning to Gainey.



*Southwestern Randolph graduate Jake Gainey.  
Photos provided.*

"The injuries my junior and senior year were heart-wrenching," Gainey said. "My senior year was my last year of playing sports with my friends. I have so many great teammates and so many of my friendships come from sports. I'd sit at practice and ask why this is happening to me? Why is it always me? But I never wanted to quit."

Gainey explains that kneecaps rest in what looks like a cup. His were shallower than average size, causing the kneecap to move around and easily dislocate.

"Every single one happened in basketball, and people always ask why play basketball? Just don't play basketball," Gainey said. "I love basketball. I love being out there."

The most gruesome, he said, came when he was a sophomore playing on the jayvee team and occurred at the Asheboro Rec Center where Asheboro High School was playing its home games while its gym was renovated.

Gainey was bumped and collided with the stage. Looking down, he saw his knee cap was on the side of his leg.

Gainey said he has tons of people to thank for getting him back on the field and the court. Intense physical therapy was needed after each injury and standing by his side were his parents and his sister along with Garrie Storie and Joe Mullins from Athletic Training and Conditioning, school trainer Victoria Curry, his coaches and plenty of others from his church who helped with his many rehabilitations.

Despite being advised to avoid all contact on the basketball floor, Gainey described one game during a summer jamboree his junior year when he took a charge and was thrown to the floor.

"I got up from that charge and everyone was excited, but when I looked up in the stands, my mom wasn't too happy," Gainey said.

After his final injury cost him to miss all but his final two basketball games as a senior, he spent his final season on the baseball field, where he was a third baseman and pitcher,

"It felt amazing," he said. "We were up and down all year. Inconsistent all year. I just really enjoyed being out there and playing a game I loved. I didn't want to take anything for granted. I wanted to enjoy the final time. Playing with my teammates was awesome."

Throughout this ordeal, Gainey said he has learned many lessons.

"Keep going no matter what is in front of you, the only person who can stop you is yourself," said Gainey who was the school's student-body president, SWR's Salutatorian with a GPA of 4.6406 and very active in his church, participating in



*Gainey was able to play in his final basketball games at SWR.*



*Gainey pitching during his senior season.*

Habitat for Humanity, the Miracle League and leading mission trips. "My mentality was I was disappointed at first, but you can't sulk in your misfortunes. You have to make the best of everything. If you complain and have a negative attitude, the outcome will not be as good. Be positive and no matter how difficult challenges are, you can get through it as long as you have a positive attitude."

Life, no matter the age, is sometimes interrupted with challenges, situations that are very difficult to overcome. Gainey is an example of what can be accomplished when one puts his faith in God, friends, family and physicians.

No matter how many times he calls.