

# Player of the Year Tucker Dordevic Achieves Big Goal

BY PAUL DANZER/PORTLAND TRIBUNE: Injury, learning disabilities don't deter Edison graduate and Jesuit boys lacrosse star.



COURTESY: CLAUDE PELLETIER - Voted the top boys lacrosse player in the state, Tucker Dordevic of Jesuit High is headed to play for a prestigious college team at Syracuse.

Tucker Dordevic spun away from two Sunset defenders and whipped a shot past the goalkeeper.

The goal, which tied the state semifinal lacrosse match between Jesuit and Sunset, was the type of play expected from a player headed to Syracuse, which has one of the top college lacrosse programs in the country.

The Oregon High School Lacrosse Association player of the year, Dordevic scored three athletic goals in that May 31 semifinal contest.

But Dordevic's most impressive move that night happened in the postgame handshake line after the

Apollos won 9-8 to advance to the state finals.

With 5:55 left in the game, Dordevic crumpled to the turf in the center circle at West Linn High, tearing the medial collateral ligament (MCL) in his right knee and ending a remarkable high school career.

When he was 3, Dordevic didn't sit still with a broken leg, and now he wasn't going to sit out his final high school lacrosse handshake. He hopped through the line on his left leg.

Two days later, Dordevic was on crutches as he made a more significant walk — to receive his high school diploma from Edison High.

One of 44 seniors selected for this summer's Under Armour All-America Lacrosse Game, he is one of the most accomplished players the state has seen.

That he is on his way to college at all is a much bigger deal.

Challenged by dyslexia and attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), Tucker found school difficult during his years at Riverdale Elementary School in Southwest Portland.

"I always had to be really on top of him his whole life," says his mother, Kathi. "I had to know exactly what he was doing, when every assignment was due. And I basically did every assignment

with him."

She searched for years for solutions, then found it when her oldest sons — twins Max and Griffin — were attending Jesuit High. Tucked into a corner of the Jesuit campus is the Edison School, a place where students with a variety of learning challenges get specialized approaches to education in small classrooms.

For Kathi, her husband Dean, and for Tucker, the Edison School was a life-changing place.

"For us, it was an absolute miracle," Dean Dordevic says. "And for him, the Edison-Jesuit nexus was a dream come true. Because here we have this little campus within a campus with these wonderful kids and great teachers. And yet, those Edison kids can take part in sports or drama or whatever extracurricular activity they want to participate in (at Jesuit)."

The change in Tucker was almost immediate, his parents say. So impressed were the Dordevics that Dean has joined the school's board of directors.

"His grades massively improved, and he started to care," says Kathi, noting that Tucker emailed his teachers at Edison to ask them to suggest things he could do to prepare for their classes.

There was never a doubt that Dordevic would play lacrosse for Jesuit. He started playing as a second-grader and joined his first club team in the fourth grade. His older brothers found other sports, and Tucker played football, basketball and through seventh grade

was a competitive ski racer. But lacrosse was always his favorite.

"In lacrosse, the ball moves so fast there's not too much stopping," says Dordevic, comparing lacrosse with football. "It's more of a finesse sport, and I was never the biggest kid."

Now 6 feet tall and about 185 pounds, Tucker was one of the smaller boys in his class until a growth spurt during his junior year. Being small didn't deter Tucker — Dean describes his son as fearless — but it was frustrating when peers who had grown were selected for the lacrosse travel teams that college coaches evaluate.

Kathi recalls a friend getting selected for a club team that Tucker badly wanted to make.

"It just made him work so much harder to reach that goal the next time," she says. "That is kind of a lesson for his world. Because every time he's had something happen he's worked harder and he gets better. That's true with school. He's had big challenges with school with his learning disability."

Blessed with great hand-eye coordination and natural athletic ability, Dordevic challenged opposing coaches this spring, finishing with 85 goals and 22 assists as Jesuit went 20-2 record (both losses by one goal to Sunset).

"Tucker is one of the most dynamic lacrosse players to come out of Oregon," says Oregon Episcopal School coach Dennis Sullivan, whose team beat Sunset

for the state title. "He is an explosive dodger who forces opposing teams to have to slide, because one player can't contain him. If teams try to pack it in, he scores from the outside with a powerful and accurate shot. If you focus on just him he punishes you with his passing."

Dordevic believes his ADHD helps him in lacrosse.

"I've always been a hyper kid. It almost gives me an advantage from an athletic aspect because I feel like I'm never really that tired," he says.

His energy this summer was to be focused on the prestigious Under Armour All-America Lacrosse Game, July 1 in Baltimore, Maryland. Then, during a scramble for a loose ball in the fourth quarter of the state semifinal match, he landed hard on his right knee. He spent the final minutes of his Jesuit career on a bench while his teammates staged a late comeback that ended one goal short.

The MCL tear will keep Dordevic on the sidelines for at least six weeks. The good news is he does not need surgery and should heal in six weeks or so. He is on crutches and wearing a knee brace. He will attend the Under Armour All-America events, but does not expect to be ready to play.

"What I've been telling myself is that I'm going to come back from this injury 10 times stronger, and try to come back a much better player," he says.

Jesuit coach Joe Corbitt says Dor-

devic is much more than a talented player.

"His motor does not stop," Corbitt says. "He is a very driven young man. He's a great team captain and a great teammate. 'Tuck' is constantly looking out for the team."

An attacking midfield player, Dordevic initially committed to Delaware. When his growth spurt finally arrived, he started to hear from big-time programs. And when Syracuse started recruiting him, the choice was easy.

Dordevic has been a Syracuse fan since he met Ryan Powell, a former United States national team member who starred at Syracuse. While playing for the now-defunct Portland Lumberjax, Powell founded Rhino Lacrosse in Portland for elite youth players.

"He was the first famous lacrosse player I knew," Tucker says of his early love for Syracuse.

Now Tucker is a pretty well-known lacrosse player, and one of a growing number of area players who are being noticed by big-time college lacrosse programs.

"That he was chosen as an Under Armour All American lets the rest of the country know what every Oregon coach has known — that Tucker is one of the best players in the country," says Sullivan, the OES coach. "And he is going to continue to be successful at Syracuse because no one works or competes as hard as he does."

Dordevic will continue to play as an attacking midfielder in college — "I've made my bread and butter

as a speedy, quick guy. Just beating my man by a couple steps and shooting on the run," he says.

A follow-up visit to the doctor in mid-June will help determine his rehabilitation plan.

"Before I hurt my knee, I was expecting to get a little bit of playing time my freshman year," he says. "Hopefully that stays the same and I can come back from this injury a lot stronger in the fall."

Those who know Dordevic best describe him as extremely driven and resilient and expect him to thrive despite this setback.

Tucker will get a jump start as a college student in early July when summer school classes start at Syracuse. The study skills he learned at Edison and the academic support for athletes at Syracuse should help with that transition.

Kathi, of course, has mixed emotions about Tucker going to college in New York.

"I've cried every day (since the injury). But I am so happy for him, and as long as he is happy, then I'll be fine," Kathi says. "It's so far away. But it's his dream."

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