

a heart for sports, despite difficulties

(BY BRITTANY NEIGENFIND)(DESIGN, PHOTOGRAPHY BY SHAUNA GREENLEE)

I have never had any problems with my health until I went to get my sports physical before my freshman year.

Everything was going as usual. Then the doctor got that look on her face. What she said next knocked me off my feet. She told me that when she was listening to my heart, she heard a murmur. She brought my dad into the room and told him the news. I didn't understand why all of a sudden there was something wrong with my heart.

Since she heard a murmur she couldn't legally clear me for playing sports. I didn't understand—my heart didn't hurt when I was playing sports all summer long. I had just finished one of the hardest summers of my life playing Two Rivers Youth Club softball and training. I didn't fully understand why I couldn't feel the pain.

A heart murmur is when your heart has an irregular beat. There are two different types, an innocent murmur or something wrong with the valves in your heart. Heart murmurs usually develop in women when they become pregnant. I knew that this was not the case.

I had to be sent to a pediatric cardiologist for further review, and until then I couldn't do any physical activity that would put a strain on my heart. I really couldn't imagine my life without sports. I grew up playing sports and I have played throughout my school years. "I'm just going to be a race car driver if I can't play sports anymore," I joked with my dad one night.

I had to wait four months before I could get in to see the pediatric cardiologist. I couldn't get the thought of not playing sports out of my mind; it was one of the hardest things.

Finally it was time to see the cardiologist, one of the scariest days of my life. My whole future could be changed just with

one sentence. The worst part was that I didn't even understand why or how this problem came to be.

Sitting in the waiting room, I couldn't fill out my paperwork because I was shaking so much. I felt like the walls were violently closing in on me and I really didn't know how to handle all of it.

After waiting for what seemed like forever, the doctor called me back and told me that I would be having an echocardiogram and a stress test.

The echocardiogram was actually really interesting when I calmed down. I got to see pictures of my heart and hear what it really sounds like. The sound of a heart is not what I thought it would be like, I could see the ventricles opening and making a swooshing sound.

All that was left after the stress test and the echocardiogram was awaiting the results. During this time I was thinking the worst possible things. The doctor told me that after further review, I do have a heart murmur, but that was not the problem.

I also have pre-tachycardia, which is when your heart beats faster than it should at a resting heart beat and while doing physical activity.

He told me that I could play sports but I would have to be extra careful, and that it rested on my shoulders to be the one to say "I need a break," when my heart starts to beat irregularly. I was so relieved and I kind of felt like a fool for stressing out so much.

In the long run this whole experience made me stronger. It also made me realize how much sports mean to me and how the way that I live my life could change with just one medical appointment.

Since I found out the problems with my heart could get worse, I try to limit how much caffeine I have. I try to stay away from caffeinated soda and sugar, anything to keep my heart in good shape. Anything to stay active and be able to play sports.

