



Athletes are harder to come by these days. Whether injuries or parents stop kids from playing sports, students still face the question — should they play?

Hyer Thomas rolls out of the pocket to avoid a defender only to be crunched from behind by an unseen defensive end double his weight and in hot pursuit. A sickening thud follows the hit as the two collide with the unforgiving turf.

But Thomas gets up and jogs off the field.

Normally this display of functionality causes the parents in the crowd to let out a collective ‘phew’ followed by a smattering of applause.

But the parents know something is wrong as a few mother’s gasps and their silence stun my eardrums.

The defender knows something is wrong as he backs away not celebrating, just staring at Thomas unfathomably ambling off the field.

Something is wrong. Through the battered blue bars of his facemask, his face scrunches up in pain and glistens with sweat and tears. His left arm dangles awkwardly as his right fiercely clutches his shoulder. It’s got to be his collarbone.

The worst is confirmed on the sideline. The bone snapped clean in the middle between his neck and shoulder, and he is given two numbing shots right there on the sideline so he can even tolerate the pain of being moved inside.

Next came a brace. Then surgery. Then an estimated eight weeks of recovery time.

But one thing stood clear in Thomas’ mind the whole time.

He was coming back next year.

And by returning next year, Junior quarterback Hyer Thomas is one of countless high school athletes who don’t let the fear of injury get in the way of playing the sport they love.

Thomas never once considered giving up his football even though he suffered a broken collarbone, a torn meniscus the year before and countless other bumps and bruises from the sport that he has played competitively since the fourth grade.

“I was thinking to myself,”

Thomas said. “It was my second year in a row getting hurt and I’m kind of undersized for my position, and I was getting asked if it would even be smart

for me to try to play next year. But the season went on and I missed practices, games and just opportunities to be with the team, I knew that the fear of another injury wasn’t going to stop me from playing football next year,”

For Thomas, the benefits of getting to play his senior season outweighed the risk of getting hurt again. But for senior Michael Mosle, who faced a similar dilemma, his senior comeback turned sour in a preseason practice.

During one of the team’s first summer practices, Mosle, who severely broke his arm during a game his sophomore year, crashed down onto the field while chasing down a receiver. Mosle’s leg was broken, his football career was over and his hopes for a successful senior season were dashed.

For his mother, Jennifer Mosle, it was a worst case scenario. After the injury Michael sustained sophomore year, she was hesitant to let him return to football, but ultimately gave in.

“I wanted it to be Michael’s choice,” Jennifer said. “It scared me as his mom, but I wanted it to be Michael’s choice, and he clearly chose that he wanted to go back.

For the Mosles, the benefits of playing football outweighed the risk of injury.

“You step back and look at, ‘Do the benefits of playing a team sport at St.

Mark’s outweigh the risks?’ and for our family, they did,” Jennifer said.

Football has much more to offer than championship trophies, and like so many other parents around the nation, Jennifer values the qualities and character that a team sport like football can teach.

“We really value being on a team and learning these amazing lessons of self discipline and hard work and working together as a group,” Jennifer said. “Especially learning how to win graciously and lose graciously. All of those things outweigh the risk of injury for us.”

Matthew Meadows ’15 was a two sport varsity athlete in football and lacrosse here, but his career in both sports was cut short by two ACL tears in each leg. One during a football game his junior season, and the other in a preseason lacrosse game before his senior season.

“Yes, my time was cut short as a player by both of those injuries,” Meadows said. “But I really loved playing those sports in high school. It was really unfortunate I got injured the way I did both times but I definitely do not regret playing.”

Meadows took on a role similar to that of an assistant coach his senior season since his ACL injury barred him from playing the entire season, and he hopes to even stay involved this season in a similar vein since his choice of college left him in a close

proximity to Dallas.

“Im hoping to help [head lacrosse coach Francis] Donald out this year,” Meadows said. “I love the sport, and while I missed my opportunity to play I still want to help out the team in any way I can.”

Both Meadows and Thomas cite the coaching staff, and specifically Coach Hayward Lee, a football and former lacrosse coach, for helping them get through their injuries and back onto the turf, even if they weren’t playing.

“Coach Lee was 100 percent always there for me after the injury,” Meadows said. “He visited me after the surgery, and he helped write up workouts for me to help get me back in shape.”

“All of the coaches helped me during the recovery time of my injury, especially Coach Lee,” Thomas said. “He was very supportive of me after the injury and even let me come out and help coach the eighth grade team some days just to get me back in and involved with football again.”

Injuries are unavoidable in a contact sport, but each year over one million athletes, according to CNS News, in the U.S. overcome the fear of injury to gain qualities and character that thrive in a team environment like football.

Thomas agreed that despite potential pitfalls, the positive aspects of being on the football team were worth the risks:

“Injuries happen — it’s pretty much a part of life,” Thomas said. “You can break your collarbone or your finger in many different ways. The wonderful experiences I’ve had playing football and being with my dad and my friends totally outweighs the little bit of pain from an injury.”

Football figures

A look at athletic participation

165,359

Number of students who played high school football in Texas in 2014 according to the National High School Football Association

The most popular sports in the nation by number of students that play according to the National High School Athletic Association.

FOOTBALL 1,088,158

TRACK AND FIELD 1,053,611

BASKETBALL 971,796

SOCCER 782,514

Percent of high schools in Texas that have a football team. Texas leads the nation in this category

34%

SIDELINED

Thomas (below left) and Meadows ’15 (right) look on as their respective teams take the field without them, both of them taken out of the action by season-ending injuries.

