

Post-accident narrative:

It was Friday, December 29th that turned my glory train upside down. Actually, it wasn't a train but my car. I'm Jamal "JT" Taylor, a 6 foot 8 inch tall senior at Truman State University. A week ago I was driving my old Honda Civic back to school with my teammate Casey, to report for practice when I remember skidding into the ditch and waking to see the EMS personnel loading me into the ambulance. I could see my car in the background upside down and the airbag deployed. I remember there were so many muffled voices talking about how lucky I was to be wearing my seatbelt. I could not make out everything that was said which seemed odd to me, but I found it very painful to try to talk or move my mouth. I just kept thinking about if I would be able to play in the game next week and what my little brother would do if I couldn't play in the NBA! I hoped someone would call my athletic trainer, coach, and agent to meet me at the ER. And someone needed to let my Auntie know; she should not find out from the news.

My Auntie Rose (great-aunt) took in my brother (Ashton) and myself when I was 5 after seeing my parents pass away in a car crash. My parents were taking me to view my Kindergarten classroom when a drunk driver hit us head on. My little brother, who was 6 months old, was staying with my dad's aunt (Auntie Rose) at the time so she took it upon herself to take us in and raise us. Auntie Rose never had kids of her own. Ashton has cerebral palsy so I go home often to help with his care as it is hard on my Auntie. It wasn't long after my parents' accident that we moved from St. Louis to Milan, Missouri for the Smithfield factory jobs. My Auntie Rose is a shift manager there and I know she wishes she could retire but with Ashton's care it's not that simple.

My men's basketball team—the Bulldogs—are coming back from Holiday break after a 28-game winning streak! We won the national championship for Division II last year and are predicted to have a repeat year! I was awarded the Tournament MVP award last season along with several other team awards including scoring over 1000 career points! All by my junior year! So my senior year is looking to be great as I am a starter who regularly is a high-scorer in each game. I have some NIL (name, image, and likeness) deals with Chick-Fil-A and Marshalls. I have a deal in the works with Gatorade that should be finalized in March. I am being scouted by several NBA teams including the Warriors and Lakers; my agent (Rob) is working on that deal. I would like a Nike deal since I wear a size 15 shoe!

I do need to get ready for the spring semester. I have been preparing for my 3-Minute Thesis presentation in the beginning of February of my original research about high school Spanish class teaching strategies. I really want to represent Truman at the regional conference. This would look so great on my resume. I hate being labeled as the "typical jock" since I have a 4.0 GPA and have plans to play in the NBA for 5 years (maybe more) to save enough money to help my Auntie and younger brother. He could use a better school and care system. Then I plan to pursue my Spanish teaching profession. I also am supposed to tutor a high school student (Robyn) next week. Her family pays me for weekly tutor sessions since my campus job does not pay that much and with my scholarship hours – whew – it seemed like I just work all of the time!

Working as a server at Colton's at night my freshman year was hard on my playing statistics. So now, I am a server there on weekends in the off-season so I can have some spending money to go out to eat with the team.

Everything has been a blur since the accident. All these follow up appointments and I'm still wondering if all my hopes at being a college graduate are sunk. Slight concussion. Jaw injury. Shoulder injury. Harvey, my athletic trainer is helping coordinate all my medical appointments. What about my ball career? It's not just me I'm worried about. What about my little brother and Auntie Rose? I can tell how worried she is though she tries to put on a good face for me. And I'm not sure how I'm going to cover all these medical bills. This is the last thing I thought I'd be dealing with in my senior year in college.