

Courtney Tilley

My football journey is as old as my earliest memories—playing with neighbors and tirelessly practicing behind the house, much to my family's mixed feelings of pride and frustration. From the outset, I embraced outdoor seasons and consistently engaged in futsal during off-seasons. At age 10, private lessons fueled my determination to reach the big leagues. By 12, I proudly captained an undefeated team for the next four years running in a futsal-focused sporting school. However, my dream acceptance into Leeds University's sporting program crumbled in the final months of high school due to a severe injury during AFL play.

The injury brought forth a series of challenges, including a major concussion, torn shoulder muscles, and a damaged growth plate requiring emergency reconstruction, followed by another two years later. This marked the end of my football career, ushering in a difficult phase with frequent shoulder dislocations, hospital visits, and physiotherapy. Amidst these struggles, bright moments emerged—my baby sister's birth and meeting the love of my life.

Fast forward to age 24, when I finally received clearance to resume proper exercise. Unexpectedly, pain persisted during activities like walking and kicking a ball. While at IKEA, my leg swelled, revealing a startling truth—a blood clot extended throughout my entire left leg.

At 26, discovering solace in walking football began with meeting David Stoyakovich in our apartment elevator. Despite initial reluctance, a few attempts at persuasion from David, and

a casual suggestion from my fiancé – "why not try it? What's the worst that could happen?"

The unforeseen unfolded; I became slightly obsessed.

Walking football became a crucial step in my recovery journey. Currently, I engage in running futsal twice a week, participate in walking football two to four times, and indulge in rock climbing once a week. Additionally, I actively contribute where possible, eagerly participating in any tournaments available, even making an appearance on the news for walking football.



It wasn't solely the football itself that captivated me—neither just the distinctive style of play, the technical improvements shaping my skills, nor the enhanced fitness gains. What truly drew me in was the sense of community—the individuals rallying together, creating an extraordinary atmosphere in this sport. The role models, with years of experience, inspired me not just on the field but also in my personal growth. Their influence propels me to aim higher and become better.

Through this so-called "old people's sport," I've forged lifelong friendships that I deeply cherish. Witnessing the profound significance of community for everyone involved, I feel incredibly blessed to be a part of it. I wholeheartedly encourage others to join and experience the wonders of this incredible sport we fondly call walking football.

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