



## Reagan "Reggie" Kanagawa

[theBMSproject.org](http://theBMSproject.org)

Reggie is a former High School Softball All-American, All-State Track & Field and All District Basketball athlete. She is also, a former D1 Student Athlete. After attending BYU, she graduated with a B.S. degree in Psychology from Longwood University, Farmville, VA. Following college, Reggie worked in the psychiatric unit of the Kansas University Health System and is now pursuing a Masters in Computer Sciences.

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**TOPIC ARTICLE**

## "Navigating My Tommy John Experience"

April 2025

In 2017-2018, my senior year of high school, I was dealing with a mystery illness that would put me in the emergency room weekly from anaphylactic shock. My body was fully broken out with hives that I could feel coming up from the tissue under my skin. I was put on massive amounts of corticosteroids and other medications to try and stop this reaction my body was having. Later, we learned that I had systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE), a chronic autoimmune disease where the body's immune system mistakenly attacks its own healthy tissues and organs.

During that time, I was still actively participating in varsity basketball, softball, and track, when my body wasn't in excruciating pain. I was struggling immensely with my physical and mental health. I was committed and later signed to play softball at Brigham Young University. My physical health had been so erratic, I was scared to tell them anything, worried that they would pull my scholarship and choose a kid who was "healthier." I participated in my sports when I could, but my normal off-season training was extremely limited due to unexpected hospital visits, intense immunosuppressant medications, and doctors' orders to rest my body until it calmed down.

Track season had eventually come around and I was competing for the state title in javelin and to secure my top 25 national ranking. I was still battling with this mysterious illness, but I was determined to succeed. Following a meet where I had set a new javelin record, I was practicing with my coach on my release. My arm was feeling loose until one throw when my coach and I heard a "CRACK". I stared at my coach in horror as my right arm went limp. I couldn't hold the javelin above my head, or really any object at all, without excruciating pain. Figuring I was fatigued, I decided to rest and ice it for two weeks. After that time was up, I still did not see any improvements and decided to get an MRI. When the orthopedic surgeon went over my results, he explained that my Ulnar Collateral Ligament (UCL) was completely detached from my humerus and that I would need reconstructive surgery (Tommy John Surgery). I immediately broke down in tears. I'm supposed to be prepared to play Division I softball in 5-months, what am I going to do? I had my surgery June 18, 2018.

Before I left for college, I hit physical therapy HARD. I did everything they assigned to me and then some. In 2018, there were no softball pitching rehab programs, so I followed a baseball regiment that included shoulder and arm strengthening exercises and LOTS of stretching for that "new" ligament. I continued this rehab into my freshman year at BYU. My coaches were aware that I was going to red-shirt my freshman year and then wrote me off. I was doing the rehab on my own. The athletic trainer for the baseball team would go over the exercises with me but it was up to me to get them done. I did not travel with the team during preseason when they played. I had no one to do my throwing rehab with me except our student athletic trainer. She would come to the field and work with me

when the rest of the team was out of town, even though she never played softball before. I had to learn how to pitch again on my own.

My mental health was the worst it had ever been. I was left alone when my team traveled and was doubting my abilities from this injury, not knowing if I'd make it back to my previous competitive level. My health issues and medications caused me to gain almost 40 pounds. I was behind all my other teammates in practice and conditioning, but I still showed up every day and gave it everything I had. I owed it to myself.

Eventually, I made it through my first year and went home to prepare for my sophomore year. After I received the lupus diagnosis for the "mystery illness," the right medications were prescribed; I was progressing with my overhand throwing program and continued my strength program to improve my shoulder and elbow mobility, and I went to work.

Approximately a year after my surgery, I was completely cleared to throw overhand, but, being a fastpitch pitcher, I still had to get my underhand pitching up to competition level. I had no one to guide my training as my childhood pitching coach had passed away shortly after my return home and my pitching coach at BYU didn't spend much time working with me since I was still rehabbing while the other pitchers were prepping for conference play. Nonetheless, I worked hard and lost 30 pounds that summer so I'd be ready to take on my sophomore season.

I didn't know if I could come back from the injury I suffered. I told myself that I had made it too far, and gone through too much, to give up on my childhood dream of playing college softball. My teammates, who I was close to at BYU, had provided me with unwavering support, they saved my life. Without their love and support, I wouldn't have been able to keep going and believe that it wasn't the end of my story.

I didn't end up finishing my career at BYU for reasons unrelated to my injury, but I did find another school that allowed me to find the joy in playing again and finish my career. The injury may have set back my athletic career, but by doing so, I discovered what kind of person I wanted to be outside of softball. Since going through that experience, I have been able to help other teammates and athletes navigate the mental and physical struggles of dealing with an injury.

**Overall, this journey had taught me two crucial lessons in success as a high-level athlete:**

1. The importance of recovery time.
2. The importance of pre-competition conditioning.

I was not aware what was happening to my body and instead of taking time to rest when I didn't feel okay, I pushed myself harder in hopes it was a mental or physical block. That resulted in my body essentially giving out and forcing me to stop my activities for a longer period, instead of listening to my body when I felt something was wrong. I also believe that had I been able to participate in my pre-season workouts, my body would have been physically prepared to handle the stress my sports were putting on it. Nonetheless, I dug my hands into the mountain of rehabilitation and fought my way to the top again. I was able to finish my college career on a positive note, earning conference honors, and building relationships with teammates that will last our lifetimes.

As described above, mental health and physical health are inexorably related. Injuries, fatigue, pushing beyond physical and/or mental limits can have severe, lifetime consequences... possibly exorcizing a terrible toll on a person's

spirit and body (in life, as well as in sports). Parents and young athletes should always remain mindful and vigilant regarding the substantial risks associated with exceeding limits beyond reasonable tolerance boundaries – as determined by the individual athlete and the advice of those whom they love and trust.

We must also assume responsibility for our own safety and well-being. At theBMSproject, we advise athletes of all ages to resist being overly influenced by powerful, compelling peer pressure, authority figures and/or self-imposed pressures/expectations. Elite athletes, as well as recreational athletes, by definition test personal limits and attempt to stretch boundaries. That said, we are all more than just an athlete... we should never permit external and/or internal pressures cause us to lose sight of our own personal value and worth. Being in control of our own safety and well-being requires that we exercise reasonable caution.

Sports and competition can and should be insanely fun and exhilarating at times. However, competition can also turn into a living hell. Life is short... take the good and reject the bad... it is always good advice to keep gratitude higher than expectations.

***Together... here for our youth!***

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**EMERGENCY**

In a crisis call "911" immediately

● If considering self-harm, call "988"

The National Suicide Intervention Lifeline

**SEXUAL MISCONDUCT**

To speak to a counselor,

Call (800) 656-4673

RAINN

**BULLYING/HAZING, VIOLENCE,  
ADDICTIONS & SUBSTANCE ABUSE**

For helpful resources,

[thebmsproject.org/Safety](http://thebmsproject.org/Safety)

**CHILD ABUSE**

To report suspected child abuse,

Call (800) 422-4453

Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline

It is recommended that incident(s) of serious misconduct be reported to law enforcement.  
Minors should report incidents of misconduct to their parent(s) or guardian(s).