



The ATJ Weekly: What I Learned From the ATJ Summer Kickstarter Trial

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Building the Athlete Beyond the Field

As athletes, we're constantly focused on improving our skills, performance, and results. However, some of the biggest growth happens with time and when you're away from the competition. Recently, I had the opportunity to go through a trial version of the ATJ Summer Kickstarts program, and it challenged me to think differently about my goals, my personal brand, and the person I want to be beyond sports. What started as a learning experience quickly became an opportunity for self-reflection. The program encouraged me to look beyond wins and losses and focus on the values, experiences, and qualities that have shaped me as both an athlete and an individual.

The Power of Knowing Your Story

One of the biggest lessons I learned from the Summer Kickstarter program was the importance of self-reflection. As athletes, we spend so much time training, competing, and working toward our goals that we don't always take the time to think about who we are beyond our sport. The program challenged me to look deeper at my experiences, values, strengths, and future aspirations.

Through activities focused on personal branding, goal setting, and career development, I learned that every athlete has their own unique story. All of our experiences, challenges, and accomplishments contribute to the way we lead, communicate, and represent ourselves. Understanding that story is important because it can help us in many ways. By diving deeper into our story we can create meaningful connections and prepare for opportunities both during and after our athletic careers. The Summer Kickstarter program reinforces that success isn't just about athletic performance, it's also about understanding your strengths and identifying your goals in order to intentionally prepare for the future.

My Story Beyond the Court

One activity that stood out to me during the Summer Kickstarter was reflecting on my personal story. Before this exercise, I didn't think there was anything particularly unique about my experiences. I've spent 10 years playing volleyball and having to balance academics with it for the majority of my academic career, but I had never really taken the time to step back and think about how all of these experiences have shaped me over the many years of my athletic career.

As I worked through the activities with Miss. Fisher, I began to recognize that every single challenge, accomplishment, and lesson learned has contributed to the person and athlete that I am today. From learning how to be a supportive teammate to developing leadership skills and perseverance through difficult moments, I realized that my experiences tell a story that goes beyond wins and losses. This program also challenged me to be more intentional about my future. I learned to do more than just simply focusing on what's next, but to think about how my current actions, goals, and relationships can help me create opportunities down the road. Going into my senior year of college this fall, this reflection was especially meaningful as I begin preparing for a new chapter beyond competing as a collegiate athlete.

While I am excited for the future, I would be lying if I said I wasn't a little nervous about eventually stepping away from the sport that has been such a huge part of my life. Volleyball has been a part of my identity for many years, but this experience has helped me realize that my connection to the sport does not end when my college career does. I hope to continue being involved through coaching, helping with camps, and playing in community tournaments. Looking back at my journey allowed me to appreciate how much I've grown as both an athlete and a person. It reminded me that everyone has a unique story worth sharing, and that understanding your story is one of the first steps toward building a meaningful future.

Key Takeaways

1. *Your experiences can tell your story.*
2. *Reflection can create growth.*
3. *Being an athlete prepares you for more than competition.*
4. *Don't wait for opportunities, prepare for them.*

Take 15 minutes this week to reflect on your own athletic journey. Write down three experiences that have shaped you as an athlete and identify lessons you have learned from each one. These moments are part of your story and can help you better understand the strengths and values that make you unique.



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