

RINGETTE NTARIO

My name is Jessica Mezenberg and I am 22 years old. I recently graduated from Brock University in June 2018 with a degree in Child and Youth Studies. I just entered my first year of Teachers College at Brock University with the hopes of soon becoming a primary/junior school teacher. I played ringette for 11 years before I had to stop playing due to concussions.

I received my first concussion when I was in grade 12 playing for Guelph U19AA, my second in my first year of university playing for Brock University and my third concussion in 2nd year university again playing for Brock. After my first concussion, I did not go to school for about 3 weeks, and only slowly went back into school work. It took about two months for me to start playing ringette again at full speed. My second concussion happened at the end of the last game of my season, I missed about 2 weeks of school and took the summer off from playing to recover. Finally, after my third concussion, my parents and I decided it was best to stop playing altogether as I was still suffering from symptoms. After each concussion, I took many trips to the doctor's office for follow-ups and tests. During each visit, I had to complete the concussion test to determine my next steps or if I still needed more rest. It became very frustrating every time the doctor would tell me I wasn't ready to go back on the ice. Looking back now I am glad I didn't rush myself through the process... who knows where I would be then.



Giving up being a ringette player was by far the hardest thing I have ever had to do. I grew up only knowing ringette, living and breathing it basically and I wasn't sure what I could do or who I would be once I lost that part of me. Even though I am not on the ice as a player, I still step on as an official and coach and I love every moment of it.

Even though it has been two years since receiving my last concussion, I still suffer from symptoms every day of my life and have now started going to a chiropractor and specialist to help control my symptoms or find solutions to how I am feeling. *Since I started seeing my doctor I have seen great improvements to the way I am feeling.* I still have my bad days but there are not as many of them. The biggest thing I think I lost was my balance and coordination and I became an even more clumsy person than before. I was given many exercises to re-train parts of my brain that were impacted during my hits.

The most impactful thing that occurred because of my concussions was the decline in my mental health. It wasn't until recently that I became ok with talking about how I was feeling and letting people in close to me. Growing up I always suffered from anxiety and experienced panic attacks every so often, but even after just the 1 concussion my anxiety levels escalated. After my 2nd concussion, I began having more severe panic attacks that I could not control. I remember getting to points where I couldn't breathe and had absolutely no control over my body. Often it was my mom who stood beside me telling me to 'breathe' until I was okay. After my 3rd concussion the depression stages began to kick in. Not only did I experience anxiety, but I also suffered from depression. I believe I always had some sort of anxiety and depression trait, but I truly believe the research that a head injury can escalate anxious and depressive behaviours.



The most important message I want to get across to any athlete who has or suspects they might have a head injury... get help! The quicker you go to the doctor, the quicker you will recover and be able to get back to your sport. In addition, it is key to follow the doctor's recommendations to speed up the recovery process. It is not fun having headaches almost every day of your life so be safe!

Best Wishes,

Jessica.