

# WHERE TO

A resource dedicated to student-athletes  
and their Life After Notre Dame.



# LAND

WINTER 2025

## A NOTE FROM DR. TOM CARTER III



As you polish off your Thanksgiving leftovers and prepare to celebrate the holiday season, we hope you'll take a moment to read our latest "Where to LAND" issue. We're excited to profile three exceptional Notre Dame alumni — **Ed Lubowicki (ND '16)**, **Natalija Marshall (ND '24)**, and **Trevor Ruhland (ND '19)** — and spotlight our new partnership with **NextPlayU**, which provides coaching, training, and community to aid athletes' placement in leading companies.

This partnership complements LAND's "Career Connections" emails and LinkedIn posts showcasing former student athletes, managers, and trainers seeking new opportunities. Thanks to your overwhelming response to these communications, we've placed 70 outstanding individuals in new careers. We're on track to hit our goal of 100 placements for the year, so help us fulfill our holiday wish by watching for upcoming emails and posts.

Go check our socials for recaps and pictures from the four NFL players who took part in the NFL *My Cause My Cleats* initiative on behalf of LAND. We were thrilled to have these outstanding young men wear custom-designed cleats to showcase their support of our organization. Thank you for cheering for them and for LAND.

Visiting our new **website** is another way to support our mission and reinforce LAND's success in serving over 100 athletes to date across our five pillars. If you or someone you know would like to connect with us — whether to get involved, share opportunities, or access resources — just visit the **Contact Us page** and we'll follow up within 48 hours.

This year has been marked by real momentum, and we're excited to share news of another major step forward. Notre Dame Athletics recently sent an outreach email to more than 15,000 alumni introducing them to LAND and the resources available to them, signed by Athletics Director Pete Bevacqua. We're truly grateful to the department's leaders for their continued support. This outreach represents a significant moment for our mission, and we couldn't be more energized for what comes next.

And thank you for backing LAND as we make an impact on the lives of our fellow athletes, together. We wish you Happy Holidays and we'll see you in the new year!

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## PURPOSE IN HELPING OTHERS FIND FULFILLMENT AFTER SPORTS

During Ed Lubowicki's (ND '16) career as a scholarship lacrosse player at Notre Dame, the Fighting Irish made four NCAA Tournament appearances, reached the Final Four twice, and played for a national championship. A two-time All-Atlantic Coast Conference Academic All-American and three-time Monogram winner, Ed's skills as an attacker contributed to Notre Dame's two ACC championship wins. He earned his degree in IT Management, joined Deloitte, and over nine years held cyber risk management and consultant roles with the Big Four firm. Ed led high-pressure technology and communication projects and saw firsthand how identity and performance are deeply intertwined. He is currently pursuing a master's degree in Organizational Dynamics, with a concentration in Leadership and Organizational Coaching, at the University of Pennsylvania. His studies spurred him to establish his coaching practice, **Lubowicki Performance Advisory** ([ed@lubowickiperformanceadvisory.com](mailto:ed@lubowickiperformanceadvisory.com)), based on the belief that one's skills, strengths, and experiences developed as an athlete can be the foundation for thriving in life after sports. Ed applied the scientific research he's learning at UPenn, as well as his own experience as a former athlete navigating the corporate world, to create his practice's three interrelated pillars: adaptation of the athlete's unique set of strengths to their work; connection to their body; connection to a new community. Ed says he has found his purpose and is excited to help others find theirs, including as a member of the LAND network coaching Notre Dame clients. Here's Ed's story:



My dad, Ed, decided I was going to play lacrosse before I was even born. A player for Florida State, his focus on this plan became evident in the delivery room. There was a complication after I was born, and while I was in the NICU under oxygen, my Dad asked the nurse if this early challenge would make me faster.

My Dad's sense of humor and enthusiasm for sport carried through as he coached me in youth sports and after high school games, when the entire family cheered from the stands. His own dedication taught me how to stay motivated to be better and confident during my conversations with college recruiters.

Notre Dame was always in the back of my mind, but the realization of what a special place it was for me, personally, hit home when I visited the campus. The synchronicities were hard to ignore: Eddy Street near campus. The Moreau Seminary; that's the last name of my high school coach.

The air just felt lighter at Notre Dame, a diamond in the rough in Indiana that offered great academics, great people, and great lacrosse. The coaches, led by Kevin Corrigan, were awesome. And the locker room was a place where I could be friends with everyone. It offered a mix of seriousness and fun, full of sharp and motivated people. I felt a sense of belonging right away, the one that permeates any Notre Dame alum you meet.

### FOCUSING, PERFECTING, MAKING THE PLAY

I like the combination of creativity and team orientation that lacrosse offers.

You obviously can't win on your own, but you can master certain aspects through practice, and that's what drew me most. Focusing on one component, perfecting it, and then putting it in my arsenal and seeing where that creativity could change things on the field was so interesting to me. (After my playing days, I would come to encourage others to take this approach themselves.)

In addition, I've always been more of a distributor playing the game; I liked seeing my teammates in the spotlight. You can do that in lacrosse, add a lot of value without being the superstar.

Right off the bat at ND, two other lefty attackmen in my freshman class offered competition. One of them would become a great friend and one of the best lacrosse players to ever live, Matt Kavanaugh. Playing with someone of Matt's caliber was incredible, and quite the transition from high school. So I had to create a different value-add on the team and in the locker room, by helping others be successful.

### THE GRIND WAS WORTH IT



I didn't play much at first and didn't even travel my freshman year. This made for weird moments as I watched my teammates on TV after grinding in practice all week. I remember looking around at the others who didn't travel and thinking about how long and hard you work at a sport only to find yourself at the bottom of the totem pole.

This was a different experience for us, and it was tough. I knew going in that I probably wouldn't play early, especially when I saw Matt dominating. But you still have hope, and that's what makes athletes great: they find ways to get on the field.

My way was to play man-up my sophomore through senior years, continuing to add value and set an example for my teammates, even as Ryder Garnsey, another lefty attacker known for his creative play, joined as a freshman. In the end, our team camaraderie made the grind worthwhile, and we grew incredibly close. Surrounded by high-level guys, who were smart, experienced, and excellent at their sport, we strived for more on and off the field.

Along with the memorable lacrosse wins, losses, and plays, I look back on my time at Notre Dame as one marked by fun Saturday morning scrimmages before football games. Going from playing your sport to supporting everyone else in theirs during the tailgates was always special.

### THE CORPORATE WORLD AND A NEW DIRECTION

I knew playing professionally was never in the cards. I had a deal with my dad that after graduation I could look to other things. Also, the lacrosse league was still up and coming in 2016. Today, the Premier Lacrosse League is gaining steam, with the past season's play and Championship game incredibly exciting to watch. And my friends' little brothers are now playing in the league, a really cool progression.

With my IT Management degree, I joined the cyber risk practice at Deloitte right away. The cybersecurity field was huge at the time and top of mind for executives and boards. They needed help adapting to the potential risks, and I was on a career path at a good company aligned with my values.

I became a manager within six years, but realized I no longer connected with cyber. Though I advanced and received good reviews, I was growing increasingly unhappy. I recognized that my struggles stemmed from losing sport. I no longer had a higher purpose or a place to put all the energy that I had once poured into lacrosse. I also could have better handled early challenges at work, had I known my strengths and was confident moving into the corporate space.

That's why after years at Deloitte and with their encouragement, I started my master's program at UPenn in 2024, with its concentration in Leadership and Organizational Coaching that's helping me gain evidence-based insights into a subject that resonates deeply with me: athlete transition and transformation.

I launched my practice, **Lubowicki Performance Advisory**, this year. I've designed it to help athletes navigate transition, leaders to seek clarity, or teams to grow stronger together by carrying their proven greatness forward.

My coaching approach with others is an offshoot of my own playing days, when I improved and felt fulfilled after focusing on one component, perfecting it, and then putting it in my arsenal to make positive change on the field. Helping my clients attain their goals is grounded in my joy at seeing others succeed at whatever game they're in.

### WINNING FORMULA: STRENGTHS, BODY, COMMUNITY



To help define my practice and ensure it could provide real value for my clients, I combined my master's research study with hundreds of energizing conversations with Olympians, professional and college athletes, and youth sports practitioners. I realized I could make an impact as I learned how many of those I talked to struggled with the transition from sports. They might not have faced health or financial issues, for example, but they all experienced an identity shift unique to athletes.

I also spoke with organizations, including LAND, which is helping to break the ice for Notre Dame alumni as they reach out to each other to aid the transition from sports. LAND introduced me to one of my first clients.

This former athlete had just accepted his first job but was uncertain about where he fit in the corporate world. So we dissected what his incredible skills were on the field and repurposed them for making his first impression at work. For example, he connected how he would prepare himself for different circumstances that arose in a game - perfecting a play and calming himself before taking the field - to use in his new role.

As we made this judgment-free space to talk, articulating and leveraging his unique strengths to apply them beyond athletics, I felt a huge shift in his confidence to approach future challenges and his career.

In addition to exploring what made an athlete uniquely successful on the field and repurposing that for other avenues in life, my coaching program encourages them to reconnect to their physical self. They spent so much time perfecting their body and building strength to be successful only to land a job where that doesn't matter as much. But moving remains vital for a former athlete.

The third component of my program is helping clients find a connection with another community or group, to rely on, hold them accountable, and provide structure to their days. Again, as soon as the athlete graduates or leaves their sport, the 50 best friends they had in the locker room are gone. That community has to be rebuilt, whether it's through hobbies, corporate friends, a faith-based group, or Notre Dame alumni networks.

### PURPOSE FOUND

I recently coached a college freshman who straight up asked me if he was ever going to love anything as much as playing his sport. I said, brother, I'm writing a whole thesis on how to help answer that question. I think it's a real feeling and one that people don't address as they are living their experience. For me, it took five years after I stopped playing to realize that I was craving, and trying to replace, my connection to my strengths, my body, and my community.

We can never recreate that feeling of the locker room in the corporate world, but we can learn to look back on that experience with fondness and realize how lucky we are to have lived it.

With graduate school and my business, I've found a deeper purpose, and I wake up every day excited to do this type of work as I approach my 10-year anniversary of graduating from Notre Dame. I don't know if 10 years is the best timeline; I feel people are finding their purpose sooner. But no matter. I'm full steam ahead!

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## FINDING MY SPORT, EMBRACING MY LIFE, OPEN TO THE FUTURE

*Born in Queens, New York, Natalija “Nat” Marshall (ND '24; Miami '25) helped her Christ the King High School basketball team win the 2019 New York State Federation Championship. The team also captured two-time titles in the New York Catholic State, New York City, and CHSAA Conference championships. While her freshman and part of her sophomore years with the Fighting Irish were spent rehabbing injuries, Nat's senior season stood out. She posted career highs in points, rebounds, and minutes, along with 14 steals, 34 blocks, and 63 offensive rebounds, the second most on the team. Against the odds, Nat and her teammates won an ACC Championship. A member of the ACC Unity Tour and All-ACC Academic Team, Nat double-majored in political science and American studies and served on the Advisory Committee for Climate Related to Race and Ethnicity, Student-Athlete Advisory Committee as director of communications, Together Irish, and Monogram Club. At the University of Miami, where she earned her master's degree in sport administration, Nat was a member of the All-ACC Women's Varsity Basketball Team, appearing in 26 games, 23 as a starter. Currently, Nat is a Ford model, freelance content creator, and digital content and social media strategist for Hana Kuma. She is also serving as an Alumni Advisor for United College Athletes Association and a Student-Athlete Advisory Council Young Alumni Representative at Notre Dame. LAND talked with Nat about the highs and lows of her athletic journey, how she has created an authentic and engaging personal brand, and the one thing she encourages student-athletes to do for a successful transition after sports. (It's worked for her.) Here's Nat's story:*



Sports have always been part of my family story — my parents, David and Anne, are in their respective colleges' athletic halls of fame at the University of Milwaukee — but basketball was actually the last sport I tried. I played everything first: baseball, t-ball, swimming, gymnastics, tennis, soccer.

I started basketball later than others, but what drew me to the sport was being part of a team working toward a common goal. I loved the physicality, too. And as I grew taller, reaching 5'10" by fifth grade, basketball seemed the best path to take. My first college offer came during my freshman year, and that's when I realized, OK, I can play this sport and earn an education doing it. That part was important to me.

### MY CHOICE IN NOTRE DAME

Recruiting ramped up with campus visits, basketball camps, and meetings with coaches until I considered a final three: Duke, Stanford, and Notre Dame. All were incredible programs offering the best academics and athletics, but what mattered deeply to me then — and still does now — was that the head coaches were women.

Growing up in Queens, surrounded by diversity, gave me an understanding of power and status and what those things meant. Gender and racial inequality, social injustice; these were revealed to me from a young age.

I had always been coached by men, even on all-girls teams. As I started to see more women in head coaching roles, including Muffet McGraw, Tara van der Veer, and Dawn Staley, I knew this would become a factor in my choice of school. I wanted to play for a female leader, and Notre Dame provided a bonus: an all-woman staff.

When I visited Notre Dame first, something just clicked. I canceled my Duke and Stanford visits and committed a few weeks later.

### A DIFFERENT KIND OF START

Freshman student-athletes, especially high-ranking recruits, are typically thrown into the fire, academically and athletically. You come in and contribute; that's the pressure and expectation.

But my first year wasn't normal. Not only was it the year of COVID, 2020, but I redshirted while rehabbing an ACL injury. Out of competition, I had time to adjust to college life at my own pace and that made my transition from high school relatively smooth.

At first, however, I didn't love that Notre Dame integrated student-athletes so fully into the regular student body — no athlete-only dorms or special treatment like at other schools. But looking back, I'm grateful for this approach. It helped me grow as a person, not just as a player. Notre Dame emphasizes being a student-athlete, in that order, and I've learned that's crucial to our experience. And if people who see themselves as athletes first buy into that, it's life-changing.

### A WINNING END



After COVID, my time on the team was filled with ups and downs due to surgeries and staffing shifts. We made three straight Sweet 16 appearances, but couldn't get beyond that mark, which was tough.

But it was our ACC Championship, won in my senior year, that remains special and memorable. It was my first start, but not only that, I was one of just seven players healthy enough to be available for the championship game. In the semifinals, one of our starting 5 had a torn ACL, compounding the loss of other players during games leading up to that point.

Somehow we pulled it off and beat North Carolina State. That moment was the pinnacle of “do your job,” with everyone stepping up even though we were all hurting. Collectively we were thinking, we've come this far, we're so close, we can't lose now!

Even with the stitches I needed at halftime, after a hit to my chin, nothing was going to stop us. Full of emotion and determination, we knew that if we pulled this off, it would be legendary for the program.

### FINDING MY FIT AT MIAMI



As graduation approached, I had a fifth year of eligibility because of COVID. I was conflicted about whether to stay or transfer, but I was certain I wanted a master's program focused on sports. The University of Miami offered a 10-month program in sport administration, as well as the chance for a fresh start.

At Miami, I gained the larger on-court role I was looking for and started nearly every game. And the city itself opened new doors. It's a hub for sports, fashion, and media, with endless opportunities to grow my network and explore other avenues, like modeling and content creation. I was happy with my decision.

### BUILDING MY BRAND

Outside of basketball, I've always loved creative work. My dad has spent his career in digital and creative media — at ESPN, USA Today Sports, and Yahoo — so I learned a lot from him early on. I got into photography, editing, and brand building, teaching myself the technical side while taking pieces of information and advice offered along the way.

That included the workshops on branding and marketing that Notre Dame offered when NIL launched, helping me to refine my approach. Over time, my content shifted from being mostly about college sports to lifestyle, travel, and fashion, my current niche.

My favorite part of content creation is giving people a behind-the-scenes look at experiences they don't have access to — what game day feels like, how media days play out, what it's like to travel with a team. And I don't delete my old posts; I want people to see the journey from Notre Dame to Miami, and beyond. Having your digital timeline is cool and I find other people's content fascinating.

### LOOKING AHEAD



I had planned to play professionally overseas, in Switzerland, but I re-injured my meniscus in the summer of 2025 and needed surgery. The recovery has given me time to reflect on what's next.

Modeling and content creation are going well, and I still have the option to play in the future if I choose. My dream would be to join a team in Europe and model at the same time, somewhere close to Milan, Paris, or Barcelona.

No matter what happens, I know how important it is to stay connected. Networking has been key throughout my journey and it's the one thing I advise athletes to do — network, network, network.

While a student, I was at every undergraduate and alumni event, every football game day, every ACC event over the summer. I put myself out there and believe I've gained not only friendships and strong bonds, but additional networking opportunities. Recently, I was invited to serve as Notre Dame's Young Alumni Representative for the Student-Athlete Advisory Council. Athletic Director Pete Bevacqua knew of me, and this new role is a reminder that networking matters and will serve you well in the long run.

LAND's services mean so much. Not every school invests in their alumni-athlete community the way Notre Dame does. LAND is a trend setter and a reminder that you'll always be part of this family.

## FINDING PURPOSE AFTER STRUGGLE: A LINEMAN'S JOURNEY BEYOND THE GAME

*Trevor Ruhland (ND '19), a reserve offensive tackle for Fighting Irish Football during his freshman through junior years, moved into the starting lineup at right guard for the last six games of his final season. By that point, the list of injuries to Trevor's 6'4", 294-pound frame was long — from torn pectorals and labrum to a broken ankle and nose to a knee eventually requiring three surgeries — yet the team didn't surrender more than one sack in any of those games. He helped the offensive line finish the season at 11th nationally in sacks and 13th in scoring offense. Trevor entered the workforce after graduating with a degree in management consulting, and today is an account executive for VelocityEHS. He and his wife Nina, an accountant, live in Chicago. Trevor's published chronicle of his swift transformation from a person of almost 300 pounds to one weighing just 150, due to an eating disorder, is one of trial and triumph. He writes that his experience is like that of countless other former athletes battling personal struggles, and as he describes his eating disorder, as well as his thoughts about finding balance and fulfillment in life after sports, Trevor says he hopes his story will help others feel less lost or alone and more resilient, adaptable, and honest with themselves. LAND sat down with Trevor to learn more about his early life, his transition from Notre Dame, why he decided to write his testimonial, and the reaction to it so far. Here's what he told us:*



I was born and raised in the Chicago suburbs, in a small town called Cary, about an hour northwest of the city. It's also the hometown of both my parents. While I played baseball, basketball, and track growing up, football was my destiny. My father, Matt, was a two-time All-Big Ten defensive tackle at the University of Iowa, where he met my mom, Lori.

I wore Iowa jerseys as a kid, ran around the house pretending to be in the games, and watched old Hawkeye DVDs and recordings of my dad's highlights, which later served as hype videos during my Junior Trojans program. Dad was my role model, my coach, my greatest influence.

As I grew bigger, I was determined to play lineman for Iowa. But when I visited the school, the coaches told me I wasn't big enough. My parents still hold a little grudge about that. I moved on, though; I still wear the Iowa hats, but Notre Dame is number 1, even if it wasn't always that way. If you're from Chicago, you're either a fan or you despise them. That was me.

Other recruiters were Minnesota and Northern Illinois, some Big 10 schools. But then Notre Dame Coach Harry Hiestand invited me to camp and once I saw the campus, I grew excited about an almost perfect package: Two hours' drive from home, world-class education, the chance to play for Hiestand and connect with the local alumni network later on.

On April 5, my brother's birthday, I got my Notre Dame offer (taking a shine off his big day). Just two days later, Hiestand wanted my decision. I sat down with my parents...and announced I was going to Minnesota, my first offer. Nope, my shocked parents said, reiterating the benefits of a Notre Dame experience.

I don't remember them needing to do a lot of convincing, and thank God, it worked out well. And when my parents found and fixed up a little house just one mile south of the stadium, with its view of the golden Dome from the end of the driveway, they bought into the whole Notre Dame experience, literally.

### THE FIRE HOSE OPENS

First year at Notre Dame? Yeah, it's cliché: like drinking from a fire hose. In high school, I was the big fish. Suddenly, I was surrounded by Nick Martin, Ronnie Stanley, Quenton Nelson, Sam Mustipher, Alex Bars — guys who went on to long NFL careers. How could I compete with them? Academics fed the flood; along with business courses, I was suddenly in philosophy and theology classes, and balancing those with practice was challenging.

So I was excited to head home for the summer after spring semester of my first year. I'd see my parents, my dog, and get to hang out with my high school buddies for a few weeks before going back to camp. As I checked my phone in the driveway at home, I saw a missed call from Adam Sargent, our academic advisor.

He told me I had a 1.6 GPA and was on academic probation. If it happened again, I'd flunk out. That shocked me, and sitting on the porch, I cried. How could I let this opportunity slip through my fingers?

That was the kick in the ass I needed academically. I knew it would be a long process on the field to compete with those amazing players, but I could fully control my grades in pursuit of the degree I wanted. With tutors, advisors, and Adam Sargent's support, I graduated from Mendoza with a GPA over 3.0.

### EARNING MY SHOT



It was a long journey to see the field. I was always the sixth man, and I knew I wasn't going to be the biggest, fastest, or strongest guy, especially with my many injuries. So I had to be smart and versatile, learning all the positions, knowing the film, and being ready to plug in wherever needed. And during my last two years, I started in 16 games, making it all worth it.

One of my favorite experiences came in my fifth year during a game against Virginia Tech at home. I was physically spent at that point: my knee was done, I had a pulled hamstring, ankle problems, shoulder issues. My body was dying, and my coaches were basically trying to get me to game day each week.

Late in the game, we put together a 16-minute drive, with Ian Book scoring on a scramble to our right side and tying the game. The crowd went nuts and the whole team ran to Ian. Everyone but me, that is. After my block to aid Ian into the end zone, I stood there, just 10 yards away from the celebration. I didn't have the energy to move.

We got the extra point, but my tank was on zero. After the game, I mustered a laugh with the media who knew all about my physical state. I'd done what I could and played to my strengths. I couldn't move a 320-pound nose tackle 10 yards off the ball, but I could see the safeties creeping down for a blitz and communicate that to the rest of the offensive line, for the win.

### UPSIDE TO THE PANDEMIC

As graduation approached, I knew I wasn't going to play professionally. I couldn't pass a physical and I also didn't think I was good enough. So I transitioned into the work world, with dad once more my role model. After football, he had built a career in sales, working from home, and as a kid I had listened to him make cold calls. Sales intrigued me, and as dad always said, that's where the money is.

But timing helps. Back home, when I started having final interviews with companies, the pandemic hit, and those opportunities were pushed away. Honestly, this provided a breather for me after five years of living football like a full-time job.

So, my days looked like this: I would wake up, lift weights with dad in our basement gym, take the dog for a walk, play video games with my brother, a student-athlete at home during the pandemic, and then sit around eating pizza and drinking beer with the family.

### BEGINNING OF THE BATTLE

And then I got antsy. Obviously, I didn't want to be 300 pounds forever. It's not healthy for your heart or your body. So I put my mind to losing weight. I started by taking it easy in the gym, but my diet changed dramatically. No more Little Caesars after training or eating five times a day like my playing days. Instead, Mom made grilled chicken and salad, and within two months, I was down 50 pounds. The fat just fell off, and my knee and shoulder felt better.

Now that I could lift weights at my own pace, I began to train for aesthetics instead of function. When I got a little vein in my bicep I thought, hey, you're starting to look better. In my mind, this was all good.

And then I hit a weight plateau. I still wanted to lose more, so dad, who's a big guy, too, suggested we both try intermittent fasting, starting with no breakfast. We lost some weight. Okay, now let's stop eating so many carbs and drink less beer. Lost some more weight. Every time I hit a plateau, I tweaked something, doing more physically while eating less.

### FINDING MY LIGHT, AND THEN DARKNESS



During this time, I met my wife, Nina, a TCU graduate in accounting who happened to live one town over. What were the chances? Because of the pandemic, our first date was walking our dogs. When she later moved to Dallas for work, I joined her. And that's when things unraveled.

Without my family and friends nearby and Nina working long hours, I was lonely and sad. I felt out of control. Until I realized what I could control, and that was my weight.

Every morning, I jumped on the scale and would become disheartened at not dropping a pound overnight. Since I wasn't eating until late afternoon, I'd lose it emotionally. I became a hothead who wore two sweatshirts in hot and sticky Dallas to hide the skeleton underneath.

My family noticed something was wrong when they visited. Nina encouraged me to see a doctor, and when tests revealed liver issues, I hoped they explained my eating disorder. Obviously, it was the other way around.

The lowest point came when we traveled home for a family party, the same day lab results revealed nothing major was wrong with my liver. I was so weak that Nina, five feet tall and 120 pounds, had to carry my light backpack through the airport. It still hurts to think about it, the shame I felt. At the party, I sat in jeans and a sweatshirt while everyone else wore shorts in July. That night, I told Nina I needed help.

That experience — Nina having to carry my flimsy backpack and my miserable attitude with family and friends — was the first kick in the ass that started the process to get better.

### LETTERS THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING

The second kick came after a visit with my brother and his wife in Chicago. We did a bar crawl and again, I was not myself. No laughing and joking while hanging out with the rest of the crew; instead, I was angry and checked out. The next morning, my brother hugged me goodbye and dropped something in my pocket. Read this at home sometime, he said.

A few weeks later, while rummaging through the car's glove box, I found the packet of letters from my siblings, my sister-in-law, and Nina. They all wrote that they missed the real me.

That broke through. I started therapy, learned to open up and be more vulnerable, and realized it was okay to not be okay. Something had switched in my athlete's mind, one trained to be mentally tough. I realized that everybody is fighting something in their life, and if this was the battle that I had to go through, so be it.

### WRITING IT OUT

As an athlete, I've learned to stay flat emotionally; never too high, never too low. But I love my wife more than anything, and while not outwardly lovey-dovey, I write little love notes in her journal. Writing is a way to express my emotions, and it's been truly therapeutic for me.

As I started to heal and get better, Nina suggested I continue to write my experiences and feelings down, just for myself. And when I eventually shared my words with her and added some additional sections on friendship, recovery, and finding purpose, I asked my family to read it, too.

I hadn't needed to worry about their reaction; they found my story amazing and when we all agreed it should be out in the world, I put it there.

The responses after my story's publication on Blue&Gold.com have been absolutely insane. People I haven't talked with since freshman year in high school ask if they can call me. The athletic director of Youngstown State requested I speak to his athletic department. Former coaches and student-athletes contacted me with thanks for sharing my experience with an eating disorder, saying they've struggled with it, too.

The point of writing all this down wasn't to publish it, but I'm very, very happy I did. Mental health is a widespread issue, but eating disorders in men isn't something you often hear about.

### SOMEONE IN YOUR CORNER

Last summer, I walked a marathon. Not to burn calories or for competition, but to physically challenge myself and test my knee after replacement surgery. I woke up on a Saturday morning at 4:30 am, put on my headphones to listen to my Bible and some podcasts, talked to people on the road, and 8-1/2 hours later, crossed the finish line.

Today, I'm at a healthy weight. People tell me I look so much better, and I think so as well. I'm more present in my relationships with family and friends, and I'm grateful for them; I never would have been able to heal without their support.

If anyone reading this is going through the struggle I did, remember, it's okay to not be okay. People aren't going to look at you differently. If anything, they're going to see your strength in getting the help you need.

The greatest advice I can offer is to lean on the people who love you. Everybody has someone in their corner, even if they're not vocal about it. If you reach out and say, I need help, they'll respond because they care. And that includes LAND, which is standing by, dedicated to athletes and their mental well-being.

Finding yourself and your purpose is a challenge. When you're an athlete, you wake up every day with a focus on specific goals — the next season, a national championship, graduation. And then, you're done. It's not like you're tossed away; Notre Dame is still there for you. But you have questions: What do I do now? What are my new goals? How do I achieve them and find happiness in the world?

Write this down. You can answer those questions and find fulfillment and your purpose, with a little help from your teammates in life.

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## POST-ATHLETICS CAREER TRANSITION PARTNER: NEXTPLAYU



Stepping away from the game doesn't mean leaving behind ambition, discipline, or impact. That's why LAND is proud to partner with **NextPlayU** to help former Notre Dame student-athletes open the next chapter of their professional journey.

NextPlayU is a career transition program built for athletes by athletes, and through our partnership, LAND athletes

gain access to tailored career coaching, employer connections, and a national network of high-performing former athletes who are successfully navigating similar transitions.

### TAKING ON THE TRANSITION CHALLENGE AND WINNING

Founded by former professional athletes and mission-driven leaders, NextPlayU empowers former college and pro athletes to thrive beyond the game. Like LAND, the NextPlayU team knows that finding a new career after sports is challenging. So their approach is grounded in identity coaching, career preparation, and community, helping athletes find direction, gain confidence, and transition into industries where their skills translate and their potential is valued.

The NextPlayU team includes:

- **Ryan Nece**, former NFL linebacker, Founder & Chairman
- **Oren Gabriel**, Stanford MBA, Founder & CEO
- **Jason Price**, USC All-American and Harvard MBA, Founder & COO

Together, they bring a powerful mix of sports grit and professional acumen, and they've built a pathway that speaks directly to athletes' strengths and challenges.

### PREPARING, PLACING, EMPOWERING

NextPlayU is not a generic staffing agency. It's a professional accelerator tailored specifically to the athlete experience. Through small-cohort learning, one-on-one coaching, and direct introductions to hiring companies, athletes receive the training, exposure, and guidance they need to succeed.

Participants learn how to position their athletic background as a strength, build key professional skills, and join a growing community of alumni who are now thriving in industries such as tech and finance.

### HOW TO GET STARTED

Any former Notre Dame student-athlete interested in exploring career opportunities through NextPlayU can reach out directly to the LAND team, by submitting [this form](#). We'll set up a brief intro call to understand your goals and determine next steps.

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"Our partnership with NextPlayU brings a complementary dimension to LAND's services by matching athletes with companies based on need and authentic fit and regularly checking in and maintaining dialogue for their continued success."

— Dr. Tom Carter, LAND's CEO

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"NextPlayU's blend of industry expertise, strong company connections, and hands-on coaching equipped me with the confidence and clarity I needed to transition from professional basketball into tech sales. Jason and Oren's approach, both personable and practical, makes them exceptionally effective at helping athletes break into the field, and my experience was no exception. I'd recommend them without hesitation to any athlete looking to enter the world of tech sales."

— Nikola Djogo, MBA (ND '20, '21)  
LAND client placed through NextPlayU

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