

## **2013 JOP Episode for Angelyna**

<Translated from Japanese Draft>

2012 was the most significant year of my life.

I started the year with a goal to finish the year in the top 3 of JOP under 12.

From the middle of April, I started making big progress. By June, I was beating top players and playing my best tennis ever. I won several tournaments, to include a qualifying event to represent Kanagawa with my sister in South Korea in August. It would be my first international tennis tournament outside of Japan. Our apartment building was under construction and we were looking forward to how nice everything would look when it was finished. I was happy and on the verge of reaching a career-best rank of #2 if I could win my next tournament.

However, everything changed in an instant.

It was the end of June and I was on the stairs, which were under construction, when a piece broke off and I slipped, landing hard on my back on the concrete. I felt unbelievable pain in my spine. The next morning I was stiff and still in a lot of pain, but I pushed myself to play tennis with others because we had court reservations. However, when the racket struck the ball, the pain in my back exploded from the shock. When I twisted my waist to drive through the ball, the pain was unbearable. I went to a local sports chiropractor and he said to stop playing tennis immediately.

He said I needed X-rays, but being Saturday I would have to wait two more days because he recommended that I get checked at the hospital with the best X-ray system. On Monday, the doctor looked at my X-ray on the computer and said, "You have a broken spine!" I was shocked. He also said that even when the bone has healed, I may have serious nerve damage and may never be able to play competitive tennis ever again. I imagined not being able to walk and got scared. It was the darkest time of my life.

I couldn't carry anything heavy. I couldn't walk more than about five minutes. I couldn't go to school. I couldn't even go anywhere far in a car, as I couldn't sit long in a moving vehicle. The pain was so bad I couldn't even think straight to concentrate and study.

My parents and sister told my friends what had happened to me, but nobody called or emailed me. I was very depressed and had never felt so alone.

As the pain in my lower back got better, I became more aware of the pain in my neck and left shoulder. I did have nerve damage that would affect my arm!

Once I could practice again, after only three days, I hit a backhand and felt a massive bolt of pain from my neck and shoulder. My arm was dead and I couldn't even hold the racket. I started playing with acupuncture needles in my neck through to my left hand to help with the pain, which scared and freaked me out.

I always played with a two-handed forehand AND backhand, but because of the numbness in my left arm and not being able to turn my waist; I had to learn how to hit with only one-hand. I still had too much pain, but I really wanted to play tennis, however, I wasn't able to extend my left arm to toss for a serve. Although I couldn't compete, I still went with the Japan team to South Korea, where I continued to practice. On the bright side, I made new friends from China and South Korea. I was also recognized for interpreting between English and Japanese by the professional interpreters and because of my potential, I was invited by the Chinese national coach to train in China and meet with a medical specialist he knew. I returned to Japan positive and trained carefully with my father.

I got medical treatment every day and we kept trying different things, but the nerve damage wasn't getting better. My doctor had no idea when I would fully recover, if ever. My ability playing one-handed improved and I could play well sometimes. But I kept having periods of intense pain, and sometimes my arm would go dead for a short time during a point.

We always hid my injury from opponents during a tournament, and I was even able to reach the finals in Oiso. However, in the end the pain would be too much and I had to retire my first three tournaments in September.

I had my first breakthrough at the end of September in Izu Kougen Lobbing. Then I played well again at the end of October to win in Sugita. Reaching my goal became possible because I had played so well before getting hurt.

My dad kept inspiring me with stories of two American football stars that made remarkable comebacks from major injuries this year; Adrian Peterson and Peyton Manning, who also suffered nerve damage in his neck as I did. So I was determined to train hard and not give up. I won a couple more JOP titles in December and secured the year end All-Japan #1 ranking under 12!

Making my comeback in tennis was the toughest thing I had ever done, and even though I've only been playing one-handed a short time and am not fully healthy, I had high hopes starting the year #1 under 14.

However, just when I thought I was ready to improve in 2013, the nerve damage resurfaced after attempting to hit a two-handed backhand again. I continue to have periods where I lose feeling in my left arm or feel intense pain, and still cannot regain the full strength in my arm. We can't find a doctor or anyone who can help me in Japan, so I may have to go abroad and have surgery. I'm told my dreams of being a professional tennis player may be over. I will never give up, but I'm sad to think this may be my last Tomas Cup National Championship.

At least I have achieved something in tennis by becoming #1 in JOP for my division. I want to congratulate my younger sister, Christyna, who as a 10-year old became All-Japan #1 in all of JOP! I also want to sincerely thank God and my family for their support, as well as Sports Sunrise for organizing the Japan Junior Tennis Tour and giving kids like me a chance to experience some success playing the sport we love!

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