

“The Wheelin Jazz saved my life!”

My name is Steve Oaks, I grew up in West Jordan Utah. I was born with a heart condition (still have that heart condition) that kept me from playing sports, especially basketball. If you asked anyone who knows me, you would know that basketball is my life. I would/do, play any chance I could, even when my doctors told me not to. I remember every Christmas the only thing I'd ask for was a new basketball! Growing up I loved watching the Utah Jazz play, and I always wanted to be like John Stockton. I have always been impressed with his skills, and his job on the team. I admired he always knew where the ball needed to go, and what play was best. This is something I want and try to achieve every time I roll onto, the court.

I'm married to my best friend, high school sweetheart, and the love of my life Rachell Oaks. We've been married for almost 17 years now, and we have 1 beautiful daughter, Roxy, who is the light of our lives!

For a little over 10 years, I worked as a CNA/RNA, a job I found very rewarding, even though it was very hard work. I have ,and still do ,love helping people. I was working towards becoming an RN, a dream I still have.

A day my life changed forever.

I realized, I had been severely rear ended, totaling our car. By the grace of God, **I walked away from the accident.** However I did wind up in the hospital with spinal cord injuries which led to 4 back surgeries. **Unfortunately the last surgery left me paralyzed.** I have never felt so scared in my life. All the questions started to creep in. Why me?, How am I going to do this?, What will my family think?, How am I going to support my family?, Can I still be the best father to our daughter?, Do I want to even live?, As the questions started to creep in the darkness soon followed. Depression settled in and suicidal thoughts percolated to the surface. I just didn't know what to do next

My wife saw this, and wanted to help me see I'm still me, and to help bring me out of that darkness. She was working for the state of Utah registering business names at the time, when she received a call about the Wheelin' Jazz name. My wife told me she had a feeling she needed to ask how she could get me into wheelchair basketball. The immediate answer she got was, "Bring him to practice this week!" She was so excited to come home and tell me all about it. At first (being in my funk) I told her I wasn't sure if it's something I'd want to do. My wife has always known how much I love basketball ball, and she just knew it was something I truly needed in my life, and she was right! I showed up to practice and met an amazing group of people, who from day one let me know I wasn't alone, that they cared, and that this is what adaptive sports is all about! The minute I sat in that ball chair; I knew this was the thing I needed! I found purpose, and excitement in my life again, I found the missing piece of me, even more so, when I was asked to play on the Utah Wheelin' Jazz team!

I can't tell you what would have happened if I did not find my missing piece. Wheelchair basketball in a huge part of mine, and my families' lives. I am living proof that adaptive sports, especially basketball is truly lifesaving!

I am so grateful for my wife for being by my side through thick and thin, and pushing me into one of my now greatest joys. She kept me going, even when I wanted to give up and showed me how to choose to be happy, even when times are tough. I am also, so grateful for the beautiful sport of wheel chair basketball, and my team, which is some of the greatest people I know, and I get to call friends. I'm so grateful and truly blessed to be a part of something so amazing, for the Wheelin' Jazz, and all of the sponsors, and supporters, that we have to help make a difference in our lives.

This sport and foundation has truly saved my life.

Steve Oaks