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Transcription details:

Date: 08-Feb-2016
Input sound file: 189_Huffines_Sports_Med_BrownHD5

Transcription results:

- S1 00:00 would like for you to help welcome to the stage an Aggie legend, Mr. Reggie Brown. [applause] It's all you.
- S2 00:10 Thank you. Howdy.
- S3 00:14 Howdy.
- S2 00:15 Is everyone still awake? Now we got all the smart people out of the way, so now you guys just have me. Before I begin, my talk, or my discussion, I wanted to let you guys know when I first received the call about doing this, by doctor John Thornton - I think he's in here somewhere, I don't know where he's hiding at, way in the back of course - he kind of asked me to do it and I did know exactly how big this event was. I just thought, "Oh, it may be a small group, classroom full, not a big auditorium and not streamed to so many different campuses," but thank you John. Then I learned last night, I'm the last person to go after that wide array of doctors, and a magician, that helps children. And of course I haven't done this speech, well, had this discussion regarding the day my life changed regarding my football injury. So here it goes.
- S2 01:24 As you can see in your program I started-- let me stop there. I began playing football in ninth grade. Here in Texas a majority of a football players start Little League, maybe middle school. But the way I got started, a good friend of mine, which is still my best friend till today, he said - when I was eighth grade going to ninth grade - he said, "Hey, next year you're going to play football with us when you get to high school." He was a year in front of me and my remark to him was, "Okay." That's how I got started. So when I made it to ninth grade, lo and behold, went out, end up starting both ways. I told my dad I was going to go play football. My dad's remark was, "Don't you think you're a little small? You think you're big enough to play football?" And me, being my personality, I kind of take everything as a challenge. But I didn't know that summer, after my ninth grade year, I would grow 6 inches and put on 40 pounds, so, kind of worked out [chuckles].
- S2 02:31 But, like I say, I had a pretty good high school career. Then I started getting recruited by a lot of different schools. I think it was my sophomore year we had a track meet here at A&M and a couple of my teammates, we said, "Okay. Let's wander around campus." You know, we had a big break - I threw the shot put and threw the discus - so we end up walking across campus. The campus looked much different than it does now. It looked a lot different than it does now, let me say that. And we had found our way to the MSC, and went in, saw the bowling alley down in the basement, saw the video games - I don't know if it still looks that way now. And I said, "Man, you know, I can come here." I had no idea about getting a scholarship here at that point. So, lo and behold, I start taking recruiting trips. The day before I took my recruiting trip here at A&M-- my coach was a big longhorn fan. I was raised in Austin so - yeah I know, give it to him. As I say, I am a bit of a rebellious, hardheaded person. So he said, "Now don't go down there and commit," you know take all your trips. Because after my weekend at A&M I was going to take an official visit, even though I lived right there in Austin, take an official visit to TU." Lo and behold this happened. My wife loves this picture, have no idea what I'm jumping for, but obviously I was excited about something. So, like I said, all of my accolades are there in the program, so I won't go through all those.
- S2 04:02 But my time here at A&M was by far my best experience in football. Not only just the on-the-field fun, but my time here off the field got to meet a lot of great people, got to play a tremendous amount of football. I think my four years here, I think I lost a total of six games. So, I'm trying to think, was it 12-1 my freshman year, 10-2, 10-1, and 9-3 my senior year, which I still look back on my senior year - it still makes me mad to this day. Like I say, it's my mentality. Anyway, so like I said, my playing days, by far the best time in my life, as far as playing, and I developed a love for football. High school football was fun, like I said I was still learning, but my days here at A&M is when I grew with an attitude. I grew more or less with a passion for it. And like I said, I got to have the experience of playing with some tremendous guys. I mean, we used to be able to watch films the following day after a game and we could see us pulling each other off, trying to make a tackle. It was more of competing with one another as opposed to competing with the other team.
- S2 05:28 But, come to my senior year I had, like I said, quite a few accolades. Then it came to-- you know you start thinking about, "Will I get the opportunity to play professional football?" So, you know, I didn't think much of it. I might get the opportunity going into my senior year. Then I get, of course teammates, "Oh man. You're going to get a shot. No problem." But, you know, you want to keep those kind of things out - read about yourself in the magazine, in the newspaper, there are people across campus-- but I like to keep myself humble and keep myself grounded. So, then went through my senior year. Had a pretty good year. Went to the Combine. I think I had the fastest 40, second in the vertical, second in the broad jump, fastest 5-10-5, and yes, today, I still look at the Combine they show every year on NFL Network to see if my numbers compete. And yes I still got the fastest 40 - one of the fastest 40s each year - I watch. So I end up getting drafted, 17th pick to the Detroit Lions - quite humbling.
- S2 06:44 I watched the draft in my house, our duplex in Austin, Texas. It was me in the living room by myself, like I say I'm a real humble fellow. My mom and my little brother were in the back room watching it. Even though I went 17th pick, I still had to wait four hours for me to get picked up. So my first year started off a little rocky - tore my MCL, knocked me out the first six games of the season. Like I say, I lost six games total, my four years at A&M. First in Detroit I lost 11. Now, you're talking about a

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different kind of atmosphere. Went truly from a love of the game to straight business. I had someone on my team that was 38 years old. I think my dad was 39 at the time, or 40. He might have been 40 at the time. So that was like-- his son was like maybe a junior high school. I was like, "I was just in high school like six years prior." So, it kind of keeps you the level of how things go.

- S2 07:53 All right, so let's get to the day when things went awry. So I started off that morning just like any other day. Stayed in a hotel that night. We always got the opportunity-- you can go home from when you check out the hotel. We go home, come back-- well once I left my house I didn't think anything was abnormal about it, just drove out the driveway. I might've looked at it, don't even recall, but I didn't know at the time that that was going to be the last time I saw my house, ever. I never saw my house ever again on that day.
- S2 08:36 I drove to the stadium like any other game, made it to the game, parked, went in, got dressed like any other day. Got my ankles taped, went out, warmed up, warmed up teammates, did our hitting drills, ball drills. Went in, got dressed, waited for the team to get ready. Said our team prayer, said my prayer over to the side. We just happened to play the New York Jets. Now, mind you, it was December 21st, 1997, last game of the season. Lot of implications for that game. It was a Sunday night game. The winner of the game made it to the playoffs; loser of the game went home. And actually I was playing against two of my old teammates - one Ray Mickens and one Aaron Glenn - were on the other team playing for the Jets.
- S2 09:29 So throughout the game, of course, we're talking noise back and forth to each other, as old teammates would do. I think Aaron Glenn was on punt return team, but I'm standing on the sideline, because I wasn't on the punt team, letting him know if I was on the punt team ain't no way in the world he would be getting that amount of yards, else I'd have knocked your head off. Like I say, just being friends, you know. So, I think it was the third quarter, tight game, crowd's going crazy. Prior-- in one play the referee had to call a time out and address the crowd, told them to be quiet because they were too loud, too ruckus. So very next play, normal play we ended up getting in a new kind of defense that we were in where it moved me to outside linebacker. Nice, I played outside linebacker here at A&M. No problem I know the ins and outs of it.
- S2 10:27 So I look-- the very next play, I look inside, I see what play they're running, practiced a thousand times, sprint draw. I see what they're doing, running back comes in, kill-shot time. I beeline. I'm running mad crazy. I'm going in for the hit. Go in to make the tackle. Lo and behold, I'm going to make this tackle on the other side, because this tackle I'm making, one of their offensive lineman is falling backwards. He's about 300 pounds. Other side of him is my defensive tackle, another 300 pounds. My defensive tackle - I don't know the offensive lineman - but the defensive tackle big Samoan guy. On an average day he could pitch about 500 pounds, least eight to ten times in a row. So I know how strong he is. He's pushing this offensive lineman backwards, trying to get to the ball, just like I'm flying free from the other side to get to the tackle. So I'm going down to make the tackle, those two, 600 pounds, hit's my 245, crown of my head, and then this happens.
- S2 11:36 So as I'm lying there, two of my teammates, over top of me - number 55 right here is speaking to me. I remember him-- I'm still awake at this point, but I'm gasping for air. I'm like you know, [inaudible], and then he's asking me, "Reg came on. That was third down. We stopped him. We got to get off the field. Get up. Get up." I'm gasping for air, I'm saying, "I can't, I can't." And the whole time, the trainer that's over me, he's asking me, "Where's your mouthpiece?" And he's saying, "I think he swallowed his mouthpiece." But he didn't know I haven't worn a mouthpiece since my sophomore year in college-- sophomore year since A&M. Who can talk noise with a mouthpiece in his mouth? [laughter] That's just the way I played, you know. If I got a mouthpiece in my mouth, I can't talk noise to the other team, I can't talk noise to anybody.
- S2 12:27 So, let me-- if you could, use your imagination for a minute. As this is going on, this same time, I'm dating a basketball player from here at A&M. She has a tournament in Alaska. Prior to this game her plan is to fly from Alaska, meet me in Detroit - because if we lose the game we're out of the playoffs - she's going to ride with me back to Texas. She's going to help me drive my truck back to Texas. So, she's flying from Alaska, to Washington, from Washington to New Jersey. When she lands in New Jersey, she calls home. When she calls home, her dad says, "Hey, is Reggie okay?" And she's like, "What do you mean? What's wrong with Reggie?" And then he's like-- her dad says, "He's hurt. Something's happened." So she's getting on a plane from - she knows nothing about this - she gets on a plane, knowing nothing about it, coming from New Jersey to Detroit. Pause there.
- S2 13:38 In Texas - Pflugerville, Texas, right outside of Austin - I bought my mom a new house, and she moved in in November. Got a new phone number. After this happened, the Lions can't call her, and she can't reach anybody at the Lions to tell her, "Hey, you need to get up here. Your son is dying." So, she's going into a panic. So, let's go back to where I am.
- S2 14:08 As everybody's standing over me, wondering what what's going on, they put me on a gurney. They wheel me to a hospital. As I leave, my teammates are like this. So in the press box, six months after the game, I meet one of the guys that's calling the game, Al McGuire. He says, "Reggie, I'm so grateful that you survived the game, because the NFL had to call us. We had to call NFL and ask them what do we have to do for the game? Can we stop the game?" NFL said, "No, you gotta play it." Said, "Even if he died, you gotta play the game out. That's just how it goes." So, as I'm off to the first hospital, completely--
- S2 15:06 Let me take you back. I'm still on the field at this point. Sorry. Brain damage. Apologize [laughter]. So, I'm still at the first-- I know my time's up. Let me keep going [laughter], I'm on a roll. While I'm on the field, like I said, I'm gasping for air. But they didn't know if I swallowed my mouthpiece or not. Then my face starts turning purple. The doctors had to come out, they had to remove my helmet, they had to cut my jersey off me. They had to give me mouth-to-mouth resuscitation to bring me back. They got my pulse; I started breathing again. Got me to the first ambulance. Take me from the ambulance to the first hospital in Pontiac. All I remember-- you can picture this as movie. Say you wheeling in, you see the lights on the top of the hospital ceiling. All I can see is lights and they're taking me to a MRI machine. And before I get there-- I'm sorry, they stick me in and

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they telling me to, "Be still. Be still. We gotta see what's going on with your neck." And I'm throwing up the entire time. I'm throwing up all over this MRI machine. I don't know how much the damn thing costs, but I'm throwing up [chuckles], okay. So I'm all over the place. But the only thing I could get out was, "You gotta go pick my girlfriend up. She's on flight, Continental blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." I don't even know the Continental flight at that time.

- S2 16:35 Okay. So let's fast forward. So then one of the representatives from the Lions goes to pick her up. They get her. She still didn't have a clue what's going on. All she knows, it's an emergency, because the guy is doing about 1000 miles an hour on the highway, trying to get the second hospital, which-- they transferred me from hospital in Pontiac, on a long bumpy ambulance ride, to a hospital in Detroit. And I'm still thrown up in the ambulance, still just thrown up everywhere. They telling me, "You gotta be still. Be still." I'm like, "No, I can't do it." I'm just regurgitating everything. So as I get to the second hospital, they're screwing this device on me. I have no idea what it is. Then all I remember next is my girlfriend walking in. And the first thing I can do is apologize, say, "I'm sorry. I didn't get to pick you up on time." As they are screwing this thing in me - and I'm like I have no idea what this thing is, then I black out from there again.
- S2 17:42 Then I wake up the next day. The Lions finally got a message from my mom, and was like-- they finally called my mom - they got the message - finally called my mom, and they flew my mom, my dad, and my mom's sister up the following day. They got them up. Next thing I know, I wake up the next day and the doctor's like "Well, surgery went successful." And I'm like, "What surgery are you talking about?" I had no idea. All I know is I got a pain in back of my neck, and I can't move anything, so I can fidget just a little. I'm doing my best. Then I remember my girlfriend coming in telling me, "It's going to be okay." And my parents are there, and I know that my coach is there. I remember saying, "Who won the game?" It's kind of what I wanted to know about. He said, "Well we won the game. We're in the playoffs." And I said, "Okay. Cool. I'm wondering when I can get back. We made it to the playoffs; I get to play in a playoff game. And they're trying to decide who's going to tell him. Who's going to let him know he's never going to play again. Who's going to tell him that his ass is sitting still for a reason? He's not moving right now. He might be in a wheelchair. Fortunately my girlfriend got to tell me, or was the person that was voted to tell me at the time. Then we kind of went from there.
- S2 19:26 But two days after the surgery I could-- the day after surgery I could fidget a little bit, start moving around - move my extremities. Then two days after surgery, they said, "Let's see if he can stand." So he rolled me out of the bed and I could stand up on my own two feet. I could handle my own body weight. They said, "Let's see if he can walk to the wall." So I took one step, took another step and I made it to the wall, which was maybe ten feet, and back. It felt like I walked a thousand miles. Then I came back, and I said, "Okay. All right. I can make this. I can do this."
- S2 20:11 Like I said, I know my time is so far gone; they're probably waiting to cut me off. But I just wanted to share my experience with you. And if I can leave you with one thing-- I had so many more things to say, but like I said I could not chop them up into 15 minutes. I would say when you see an injury, when you see a player, [I would say?] just a football player, and they cart him off, they're individuals inside those uniforms, inside the shoulder pads, inside those helmets. They got a long way to go as far as the rest of their lives. My story-- a lot of people have called it survival, inspiration, I was blessed, and that's all true. But I still have a long way to go, both physically and, yes, mentally [chuckles]. Yeah. And that girlfriend I was speaking of? She's still here. She's my wife now [chuckles]. And before that game - and I did each game, and I even did it at halftime that game - I always asked God to protect me from hurt, harm, and danger. And I used to always think for a long time He didn't answer my prayers. But He answered them, He just said, "No." But He actually-- He gave me a trade. He said, "No," but He-- that's me coming out-- He said no, but He gave me-- that's me coming back.
- S2 21:46 That's the damn contraption they put on me. See? So He said no, but He gave me my life back. Like I said, He led me through a trial. to see how I responded. And like I said, I'm still here. Still one person. Still on this roller coaster ride we call life. Mine has a few more loop-de-loops in it than most, but like I said, I'm still in one piece. And if you want to know what I'm doing now, there it is right there. So, thank you guys for sticking around. Thank you for listening to me. Glad I could share my story with you guys. I appreciate it. Sorry for going over [applause].
- S1 22:26 So we have a quick question for you. What would you say to these sports medicine rehab folks out there from the perspective of how you went through this? Would you say that there are things they need to do differently, or did you like the way you were treated, or was everything fine as you reflect back on that?
- S2 22:47 I think everything, as far as I can remember, went fine. I just think I was so late in the game as far as the mental side of it. Physically, my body kind of came back, maybe because I was such a-- I wanna say such a athlete I would say, because a lot of it was just working out to me. I was so used to working out, so a lot of physical therapy, to me, was just another day working out. But the mental part of it? You're talking to the ultimate control freak, and I had no control. I couldn't scratch my own face. I couldn't brush my own teeth. I had to relearn how to do everything. I mean, as far from what you would teach six- month-old child, or two-month-old, or whatever, I pretty much had to relearn everything. My physical therapy went tremendous. I would focus more-- if I was an athlete and I got injured, make sure they look inside the mind, because it's so much more powerful than the rest of your body.
- S1 24:01 Thank you so much for being with us,--
- S2 24:03 Thank you for having me. [applause]
- S1 24:03 --sharing it today. Thank you. Let me get that from you. Fabulous.