

Robbie,

Great to connect with you. I am DJ Hessler from Tufts University and Turnbull recipient in 2011. I have had a lacrosse stick in my hand since the moment I could crawl. It started with soft-stick clinics and continues to this day. It is a game that I have and will always continue to love and cannot wait to pass down to the next generation. I grew up in Baltimore County, playing recreational and travel league until enrolled at St. Paul's School for Boys and began playing for the Crusaders. My first two years in high school I played on the JV team. I made varsity my junior year but only saw time on Man-up situations. Unfortunately, with the way recruiting was, and how each year younger and younger kids are committing, not playing substantially until your senior year does not afford you many options. I was interested in several Division I schools, but ultimately decided to go to Tufts University where they had an on-the-rise program and a great engineering school.

The greatest of my lacrosse experiences was winning the 2010 Division III national championship over Salisbury. I would have traded any award I earned my senior year (2011), when we lost in a rematch against Salisbury, to have won another championship. After my senior year I was drafted by the Boston Cannons of Major League Lacrosse in the post-collegiate waiver draft and practiced with them on several occasions during the 2011 and 2012 seasons but was ultimately waived. I still continue to play in local indoor and outdoor leagues, and don't ever imagine myself stopping.

Receiving the Turnbull Award was obviously quite an honor for me. However, individual awards have never been as important to me as winning, because awards represent for the most part a judgment or an opinion. The Award would have meant nothing to me if our team was not successful. That being said, receiving the Turnbull Award was a great accomplishment and honor. It was a goal of mine at the beginning of the season to be the best attackman in the nation, so it was very satisfying to fulfill that individual goal.

I think to be a great attackman, you need to be a complete player, with an understanding of your offensive role, but also how the defense works and reacts. I have always thought of myself as a skilled feeder with excellent field vision, but as I aged, I became more of a threat to take it to the cage. Additionally, playing the "X" position is most similar in my mind to that of quarterback or point guard. Not only are you largely responsible for controlling the tempo of your offense, but you are also responsible for initializing and dictating the matchups. It requires not only physical talent and skill, but the mental aptitude to know what is best for your team in any given situation. I have always tried to be a cerebral player, and for my earlier career that carried me as my physical development occurred later on.

Some advice I would offer to become a complete threat is to not limit yourself early. Do not be afraid to make mistakes when you are trying something new, even if it is initially awkward or uncomfortable. Try new positions and play different sports, it keeps it all exciting and fresh. I really wish I could go back and tell my younger self to develop my off-hand until I felt equally comfortable with either hand. I feel completely confident in both hands, but I know there are certain things that I am not capable of doing with my off-hand that provide some limitations in what I do. By practicing (wallball, shooting, cradling) equally with both hands, you make yourself that much harder to predict and defend. Love the game and surround yourself with others who feel the same way. There is no better way to improve your game and to enjoy all the time you spend around it than by developing strong relationships with your teammates and friends and practicing together.

My coach used to say, “Make mistakes of commission not omission.” Some would consider this a bit unorthodox approach, but with Coach Daly, it was always about attacking advantages and mismatches in transition. Having faith to dodge to the goal in unsettled and 5v5 situations created countless opportunities. Certainly, a fair amount of turnovers comes with pushing the ball, but by playing our up-tempo style, we were able to create many more high-percentage scoring chances than in settled 6v6 situations. Coach Daly was an unbelievable motivator and leader. Everyone on the team bought into his program and, as such, each individual was compelled to put in the work so as not to let down Coach, but more importantly not to let our teammates down. Whether it was a starter or a practice squad player, every person was accountable.

I have had countless memorable moments in my career—the national championship is definitely at the top. But in terms of meaningful events, I have to tell you about the time we spent together on team community service projects. Each year we helped out at Cradles for Crayons where we worked to sort and prepare packages, such as gifts or clothes, for local needy children. Not only were these events unbelievably rewarding, but also the amount of team bonding that occurred is simply unmatched. Most of all it was such a humbling experience and further reiterates how lucky many of us have it.

I have had to battle through a number of difficulties during my career—but everything has been more than worth it. I hope you will find your experience to be as rewarding as I have mine. Keep working hard. You are almost certain to have to fight through some difficulties—injuries, losses, etc. But if you stay focused on improving every day, I think you’ll end up where you should.

A book that you may enjoy is *Lacrosse: Technique and Tradition, 2nd Edition*, Coach Dave Pietramala’s updated edition of the Bob Scott classic.

Best of luck, Robbie,

DJ Hessler

Tufts University 2012
Turnbull Award 2011