



The Best Thing I Saw at State: Ava Landry's Miraculous Return for Her Senior Season

By Ethan W. Anderson

The *Best Thing I Saw at State* is a new column that brings to life the moments that make high school sports so meaningful. Through the stories, emotions, and details that often go unseen at the state championships, it captures what the box score can't.



Just two points away from her season ending in the 2024 State Semifinal match, Ascension Catholic's Ava Landry went down with an injury that would change her everyday life for the next 11 months. As the Bulldogs trailed Westminster Christian late in the third set, after dropping the first two, Landry landed awkwardly and immediately knew something was wrong.

"When I went down, I knew instantly something wasn't right," said Ava Landry. "Everything got quiet, and the only thing I could think was, 'Please don't let this be the end. Not like this.' It was one of the scariest, most helpless moments I've ever felt."

The environment of the LHSAA State Volleyball Tournament is like none other, especially during the quarterfinals and semifinals. Three courts spread across the Cajundome floor, fans from six different schools filling the arena, all cheering at once. The noise is deafening; the energy unmatched.

But in last year's semifinal, that energy flipped in an instant. A sudden hush rippled through the Cajundome as Ava Landry didn't get up.



As tears rolled down Ava's heartbroken face, the match concluded and the Crusaders advanced to the state finals. Yet in a moment Westminster had dreamt of all year, they didn't take a victory lap or dog pile at center court. Instead, they stopped, made their way to Landry, and acknowledged her. They even went as far as to pray over her as she sat on the bench, unsure of what her future held.

Doctors originally misdiagnosed Landry's injury as a dislocated knee, but an MRI in January revealed even worse news: a torn ACL. She underwent complete ACL reconstruction, leaving five scars and requiring tendons to be relocated from her hamstring to her lower leg.

"Honestly, the beginning (rehabilitation process) was confusing and frustrating," said Landry. I got misdiagnosed at first, so for a while I was stuck in this weird space of knowing something was wrong but not having answers."

Ava spent long hours in physical therapy, pushing through pain with one goal in mind: to return to the state tournament for her senior year. She defied the odds, coming back more than a month early and rejoining Ascension Catholic in September as they aimed to return to State. The Bulldogs completed their mission and made it to the State Tournament as a No. 5-seed.

"The second they confirmed it (a torn ACL), something in me switched," Ava said. "I was devastated, but I also knew I wasn't done. Senior year was my dream, I wanted to finish my high school career on the court, not on the sidelines. I have never worked so hard for something in my life. Every day was rehab, pain, doubt, then more rehab. I just kept telling myself, 'You will come back. You're not letting this take your senior season.'"

Not only did Ava return, she was named team captain and selected as an LHSCA All-Star for the West team.



"Being named an All-Star was honestly unbelievable," Landry said.

"After everything I missed and everything I fought through, it felt like a reminder that the work mattered. But what truly made this year special was my team. They were with me when I couldn't walk, when I cried, when I doubted myself. Getting to step back on the court with them made every moment worth it."



Seeing Landry step back onto the very court that had once set her back was nothing short of inspiring. On Thursday, she helped lead her team to a quarterfinal win over Riverside, a moment that captured exactly what makes high school athletes so special; their resilience, their loyalty, and their determination to stand beside their teammates and proudly represent their school.

“Ascension Catholic isn’t just a school, it’s a family,” the senior said. “Playing here feels like representing something bigger than myself. High school sports have this heart to them that you don’t get anywhere else, you play with people you’ve grown up with, prayed with, laughed with, cried with. You’re playing for your community, your classmates, and every person who’s watched you grow up in that gym. There’s a purity and love for the game that’s so different from club or anything beyond.”

I asked Ava if she could tell herself something a year ago, right after her injury, what would she say to herself? She responded by saying, “I’d tell myself, Breathe. This isn’t the end of your story.”

“I’d remind myself that the fear you feel right now isn’t permanent, and that you’re so much stronger than you think. I’d tell myself that the journey will be hard, but it will also be one of the things you’re most proud of.”

Although the Bulldogs fell 3-0 to the reigning champions on Friday, Ava’s story is a reminder that setbacks can become opportunities for even greater comebacks. After defeating Ascension Catholic, Country Day went on to claim their 10th straight and 19th overall State Championship on Saturday over Central Catholic.

“I hope my story shows others that setbacks don’t get the final say,” said Landry. “That even when something feels like it’s taken everything from you, there is still a way forward. And I hope someone out there dealing with an injury or a hard season can hear my story and think, ‘If she got through it, maybe I can too.’”

High school athletics in Louisiana go beyond the game. Stories like Ava’s show how high school sports shape student-athletes as they prepare for life beyond graduation. Prep sports offer the purest platform for athletics; the school spirit, friendships, and lifelong memories simply can’t be replicated anywhere else.

And there’s something even more special about it here in our great state of Louisiana. The community pride, traditions, and legends that come from this state have shaped high school athletics into what they are today. At the end of the day, these are kids playing sports, but when you look beyond the game, it’s clear their experiences can inspire anyone.

And that is why Ava Landry’s triumphant return was ***The Best Thing I Saw at State.***



Author's Note:

In my role as the Director of Communications, I have the unique privilege of attending nearly all sanctioned LHSAA State Championship events. Although the schedule is demanding, I have the privilege of seeing student-athletes from all walks of life, united by two things: their participation in Louisiana high school sports and their pursuit of a state championship. In my first year in this role, I've gained a deeper appreciation for high school athletics and for all the dedication that goes into making each season and event possible.

Although my current role involves less writing than my previous positions, it has given me the opportunity to return to something I've always loved. While much of my work now focuses on press releases and public statements, I also have the chance to reconnect with my passion for feature writing, this time highlighting what I consider the purest form of sport: high school athletics.

The goal is to highlight the best thing I saw at each state championship and share the unknown stories behind these events, capturing memorable moments for student-athletes, coaches, administrators, officials, and fans.