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Amputee Malaky Lewis discovered his passion on the wrestling mat

By Greg Levinsky, Globe Correspondent | May 27, 2020, 4:10 p.m.



MATCH Charter School grad Malaky Lewis completed a 150-hour coaches in training program through Boston Youth Wrestling.

Jessica Lewis knew her son Malaky's physical disability would not hold him back.

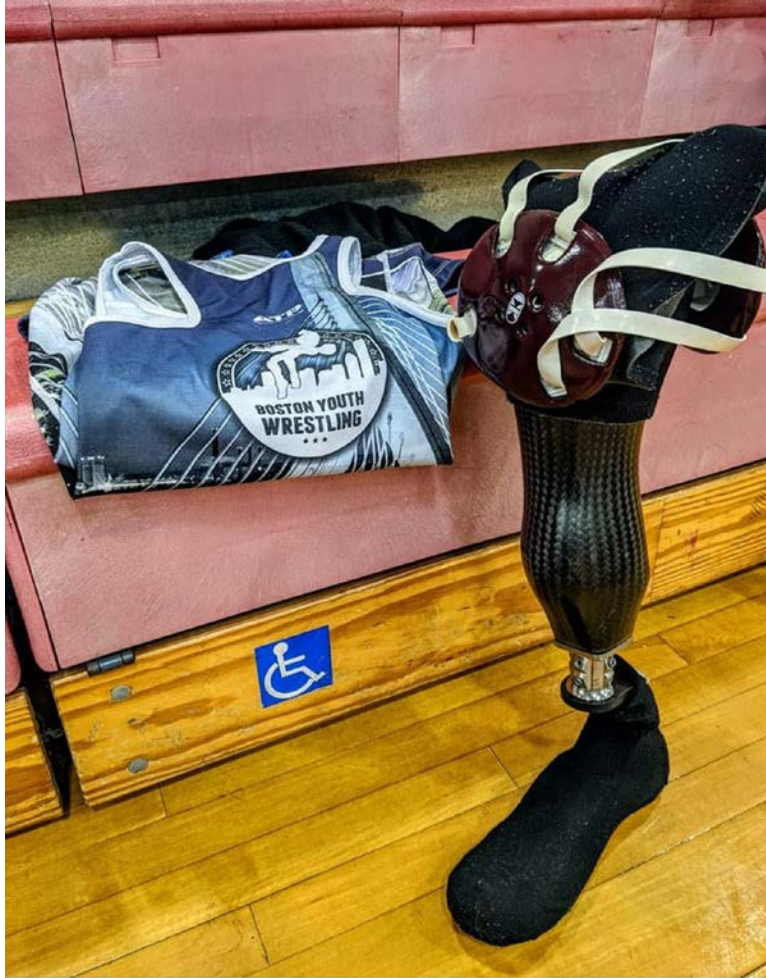
Malaky was born with amniotic band syndrome, and had his right leg amputated when he was 2½ years old. Jessica remembers that after the operation, Malaky surprised everyone at the doctor's office.

"He tried on his prosthetic leg and he just started walking," she said. "Everyone just stopped. They could not believe he was running. He started walking on his own without any type of physical therapy or anything."

Now an 18-year-old graduate of MATCH Charter School in Allston, Malaky is a budding wrestler with a passion for coaching.

"I love wrestling because of the community it gives you. Wrestling is all inclusive, you meet good people," Malaky said. "Other sports, it's not as common where you have an amputee playing, there's a lot more caution around it."

"Wrestling, it's a different feeling. When I step on that mat, everything that happens stays on that mat."



When Dorchester's Malaky Lewis is competing on the wrestling mat, he sheds his prosthetic right leg.

Malaky's introduction to wrestling came from a Boston Youth Wrestling demonstration in a 10th-grade enrichment class. His school didn't have a wrestling program, so Malaky sought one-on-one coaching from the program at a practice at Boston University's Fitness and Recreation Center.

"I couldn't do much sports-wise, but I'm a very physical person," said Malaky, who lives in Dorchester." After I got on that mat, there was a lot of weight lifted off my shoulders."

Malaky loved to play basketball and football with his friends, but couldn't participate in an organized league. He enjoyed watching his friends play, but wanted to find a sport where he could fully participate.

With that first class, Malaky fell in love with wrestling and found a team and community he so yearned for.

This past winter, he participated on the Boston United high school team, which was made up of students who don't have school programs.

Keith Bodden, one of the Boston United coaches, lauds Malaky's responsibility. He remembers taking him to his first tournament, where Malaky was upset he didn't win every match. Now, Malaky has the ultimate respect for the sport and what it brings.

"It's giving him life lessons," Bodden said. "With his disability, he didn't see it as a hindrance to him."

Last summer, Malaky completed a 150-hour coaches in training program through Boston Youth Wrestling, preparing him to coach wrestlers in grades kindergarten through fourth participating in BYW's Boys and Girls Club program.

“[Malaky] is a great example of why we started this organization. Wrestling is a tough sport, and it really requires a lot of self-discipline and mental strength to get through tough times, and he already has that. He's someone who's gone through a lot of challenges in his life, and I think we've just sort of been able to give him that spotlight.”

Jose Valenzuela, founder and president of Boston Youth Wrestling

Wrestling gave more to him than he ever imagined.

"I know when I first found the sport, I wasn't in a good place," Malaky said. "It's helped me in a lot of ways. I want to give a little bit of what the sports gave me back to another person."

He's starting an online degree in business management through Southern New Hampshire University and hopes to be around the sport for a long time.

"Not everybody's used to your circumstances, it was definitely pointed out, 'Oh what's wrong with your leg?' when I was younger," Malaky said. "Everyone comes to the table with different experiences and it helped me learn to talk to other people."

As a baby, Malaky defied his doctor's expectations. When Malaky was told to sit, he crawled. When he was told to walk, he ran.

"I always knew that he was going to be someone in his life and be great at anything he did," Jessica said. "Even then I knew I couldn't hold him back from achieving what he wants because he's going to put his mind to it and do it regardless."

The coronavirus pandemic has put wrestling, and most sports, on hold. Malaky likened wrestling's return to that of UFC. He expects it to survive without a problem.

"I mean, I think wrestling in itself is a resilient sport," Malaky said. "The coronavirus isn't going to be the last hurdle wrestling has to face."

Even so, Malaky can't wait to get back on the mat.

"There's a certain feeling you get," Malaky said, "Euphoria."



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