

Kajsa Hoffer

A HUNDRED KILOS

of Michael Hoffer

Heavy metal is the first thing you hear when entering Michael Hoffer's garage— both the music and the sound of solid steel barbells hitting the floor. Posted up on the walls are signs reading 'Do Not Give Up' and exercise equipment is laid out on every inch of the room, having been made into Michael's personal office and gym. Currently, he's working on strengthening his upper body; back, core, and arms. He'd made a bet with his friends back in Sweden when they were younger, that they could only take their shirts off in the summer if they were able to bench press a hundred kilos every year. Their truce still stands, over thirty years later. It may seem like a peculiar promise, but it's a symbol of pride between them; to be able to attain the same feats of strength you did in your prime, and challenging yourself enough to do so. Some turn away from the threat of pain working out gives them, but people like Michael find thrill in the promise of what that pain can give them, and where it can take them.

Michael is a professional trainer and track coach who strives to demystify the world of athletics to his clients, and to convince them that working out isn't as scary as dealing your soul away to protein powder, steroids, and Planet Fitness. He's worked as a pro athlete, having been ranked third in the NCAA, winning the Swedish Championships four times in Decathlon, and winning the Masters World Championships, among other things. He's also had experience overcoming serious injuries, and wants to inspire others to change their lifestyles to have a longer health span; to remain healthy and prevent injury instead of working to rectify past injuries. He wants to show that being healthy is the result of a certain lifestyle, and that health is something you maintain, not something you can get back once lost.

"I think the normal person would have stopped... [It's about] being uncomfortable. Being able to be uncomfortable"



Growing up in Sweden, Michael had spent a lot of his time playing sports with his friends. He was introduced to track and field at fifteen, which was late in the game according to him. However, it was track that got him a scholarship at many schools in the U.S, Stanford being among them. Michael knew since high school that he'd wanted to move to America, because "it's warmer. You can train year-round, and don't need to worry about snow or storms." (Hoffer). After graduating, he moved on to compete professionally and worked a more 'normal' job as an employee at a local gym. During his time there, Michael noticed that while the stereotype of Americans being obese and unhealthy was mostly untrue, there were certain aspects of their culture that warranted such titles. He realised that the job pool most sought after in his area, Silicon Valley,



was desk jobs. And with the unhealthy work ethic pushed upon those employees, spending the whole day sitting at a computer, and then going home and only having time to eat fast food, was not uncommon. The National Library of Medicine shows that the average American adult spends up to eight hours sedentary, which puts them at a higher risk of physical and mental ailments, like decreased blood circulation, and depression. Michael wanted to teach the people he helped at the gym that it was possible to get their activity in through more fun ways, like team sports or hikes. But he focused on himself at the time, centering his attention on his sport for a large majority of his life. He coached track and field at Stanford, and later went on to start his own business as a personal trainer.

At the time, it seemed like his career would continue to grow forever. But amidst his athletic journey, Michael suffered a debilitating break to his left leg in 2021, which he had to have multiple surgeries on. With intensive physical therapy, he managed to recover most of his mobility, and had hopes of competing in decathlon once more. But a year later from the first break, he shattered his right leg, this time much worse than the last. He spent a couple months in and out of the hospital, needing to have it operated on several times. Throughout, Michael had high hopes for his recovery, but “when you don’t know what to expect and [the doctors] say that you might be able to walk but most likely not run or jog again... It’s hard to comprehend when you’ve been doing that for your whole life. So accepting it is very, very hard.” (Hoffer). Once he was out of the hospital, he began physical therapy once again. Walking was incredibly challenging at first, and took almost four weeks just to walk up and down the street. One of his biggest challenges was that he had minimal sensation in his foot, and little control over its muscles. Running seemed like an impossible dream at that point, much less returning to





his normal training routine. But he supposed that just being able to walk again with little issue was a miracle enough.

Although he'd recovered most of his mobility once again, Michael wonders what would have been different if he were a "normal person", like his clients. Many lead sedentary lifestyles punctuated by sporadic and infrequent physical activity by using their one or two hours with him as their only form of exercise. He mentions that even doing the little things, like walking instead of driving or standing at your desk, can greatly affect someone's quality of life so long as it is kept up consistently. A study conducted by the Australian government showed that people over the age of 44 who sat for 11 hours a day had a 40% higher risk of death over the next three years, even if they worked out. The data shows that even those who work out can still be in poor health if they work out for one hour a day and don't move for the other twenty three. Mi-

chael also recognises that if he led a "normal" life, his recovery would have been much different. He says that as an athlete, his body was accustomed to breaking down and building back up again, and that working out or pushing oneself physically is a skill that must be learned, just like anything else. If he had a desk job, like most individuals in the Bay Area, he believes that the process of recovering would have been much more challenging. He wouldn't have had experience in recovering from injuries, nor the pain of rehabilitating muscles through physical therapy. In fact, if he were not an athlete, Michael never would have challenged himself to start training after the injuries. He never would have continued physical therapy at home, or worked on strengthening his legs again. And it was only because of his goals of challenging oneself physically that Michael was able to run again despite the doctors not having confidence he ever would. Almost a year after the last injury, he started jogging on the treadmill, and later around the neighbourhood.

Though it might seem impossible and unimaginable, the long journey of recovering his mobility had allowed him to discover the art of the body in everyday life. He also found that accepting one's shortcomings can be the toughest challenge an athlete must face. But he realised his personal limitations don't make him any less of an athlete, nor any less qualified a trainer. Track is in season for local high schools, and he's focused on being a good coach for his kids. At the same time, he's also working on many personal goals— in fact, celebrating April twenty-first, he'd finally gotten to bench a hundred kilos.

“My friends and I, we tend to compete in a lot of things, and I still like to do those things. I might not be as good as I used to, but still, I can still do a lot. I can do a lot.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Scan to visit
Kajsa's website:



Kajsa Hoffer is a junior at Los Altos High School, and as a long-time enjoyer of the arts, is a part of the animation club and the school's local fashion magazine as a photographer. Aside from that, Kajsa enjoys spending time with friends doing pretty much anything, like going on hikes, shopping, getting lunch, or hosting photoshoots.