

KAYLA BURT

University of Washington

Communication/Women's Basketball

Nominated by: Robert Post

Kayla Burt has earned many honors in the past two years. Besides having been voted a co-captain by her team-mates, receiving honorable mention for Pac-10 All Academic honors as well as the prestigious Everett Herald Woman of the Year in Sports award. But it is the ESPY Award for Best Comeback that best describes why we are honoring her today. But according to Kayla, we should also be honoring her Lady Husky team-mates as it was "their heroic actions" that not only saved her life but helped her with her incredible comeback in basketball and in life.

Kayla was a sophomore when she had her first near death experience. It was New Year's Eve, 2002, and she had been watching movies and eating junk food with her teammates. As was her custom, she decided to turn in early that evening and, as her teammates teased her about this, she noticed that she was feeling dizzy. Moments later she fell to the floor unconscious because her heart had gone into cardiac arrest. Her teammates rushed into action by administering CPR and calling 911, summoning all of their composure to deal with the most pressure packed experience of their collegiate career and working as a team to save their friend's life. Their efforts kept Kayla alive until paramedics arrived and were able to stabilize her and take her to the hospital. She spent 15 hours in a coma while family and teammates gathered together by her side. Initially she was diagnosed with Long Q-T Syndrome, a disorder that affects the heart's ability to maintain a normal rhythm, and a defibrillator was implanted in her chest. Unwilling to give up basketball, she became a student-coach and continued to be a motivational force on her team. With newfound perspective on life she was able to channel her usual enthusiasm into contributing in new ways to her team rather than dwelling on the things that she was no longer able to do.

Continued medical tests however, eventually determined that she had been misdiagnosed and it was determined that Kayla could return to the basketball court. Kayla made the most of her second chance to play the game that she loved and according to Robert Post "she reveled in every minute, every opportunity to be on the court". Against a big game against UCLA this past January Kayla was four minutes into the game when her defibrillator fired and the team doctor and trainer immediately started to assist her off the floor. The defibrillator fired a second time and shocked all three of them, but it also shocked her heart back into a normal rhythm. Kayla knew then that her basketball career had come to an end, but she also knew that this was just another obstacle that she would be able to overcome. She recently started a new career with the Hope Heart Institute in Seattle following her graduation and she is channeling her passion and enthusiasm into the new challenges that she finds in the post-collegiate world.