

Big Break Helps Josh Landau Choose Medical School

Fall from High Bar Influenced NCAA Champion Gymnast's Career Path

By Jonathan Okanes

Josh Landau figured if he was going to break something, it probably shouldn't be his head.

The former Cal gymnast was competing on the high bar while in high school when he swung off by accident. Heading head first toward the floor, he put his arm out to break his fall.

"I was coming down on my head," Landau said. "I put my arm up to break my fall. I broke my fall, but I also broke my elbow."

As painful as that injury was at the time, in an indirect way it set the course for Landau's future. Landau worked tirelessly with a physical therapist to heal, and discovered an interest in the health sciences.



Former Cal gymnast Josh Landau is now an orthopedic surgeon in Greensboro, N.C., where he lives with his wife, Terry.

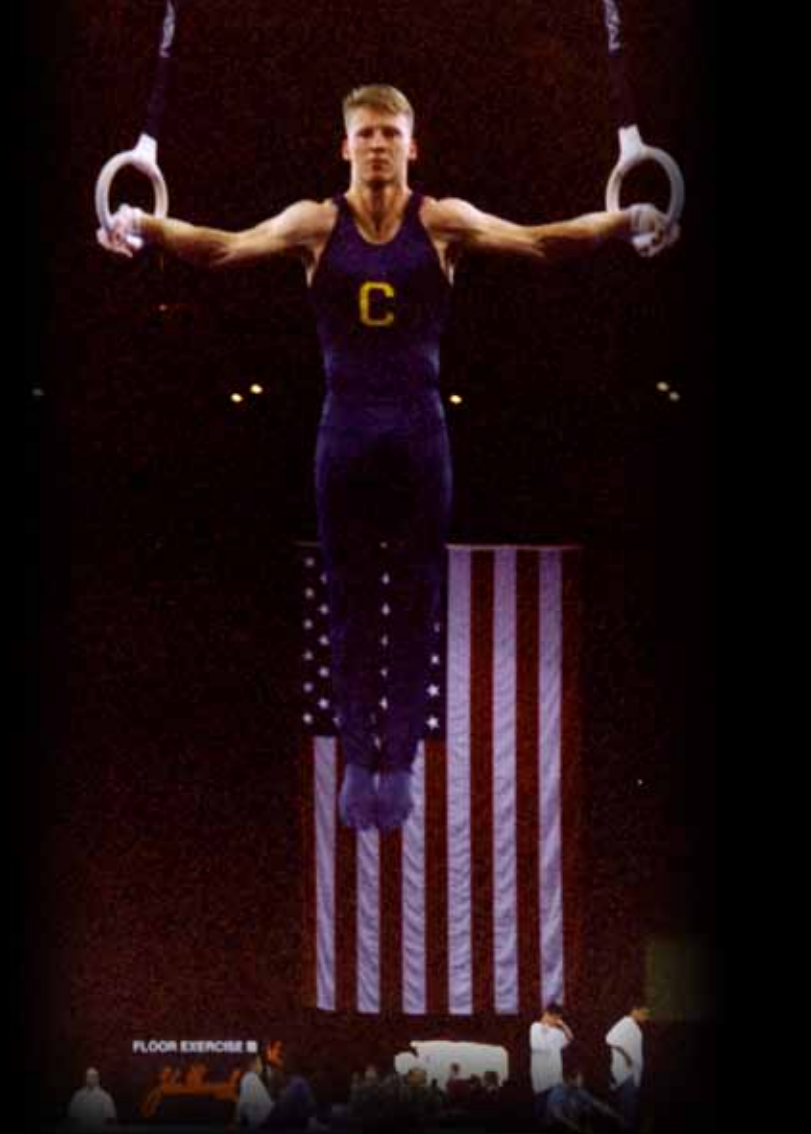
After a Cal career in which he was the captain of NCAA championship teams in 1997 and 1998, Landau has gone on to a career in orthopedic surgery in Greensboro, N.C., where he specializes in sports medicine.

"I remember working with a physical therapist after I had surgery and I really had my eyes opened what it meant to physically work toward a goal to get your health back and compete again," Landau said. "At that point, I wanted to do physical therapy. As time went on, I got interested in actually engaging in the broader scope than just physical therapy. I really wanted to get my hands dirty. Surgery gave me that opportunity."

Landau recalls an evening during his sophomore year at Cal when he and his roommates discussed potential majors. He already had an interest in medicine and health but also was considering a career in business or computer science.

Landau ultimately decided there was more depth and complexity to the medical field and decided to go that route. He got a job at Children's Hospital in Oakland and did some biotech work on campus.

When it came time to take the MCAT – the standardized test taken before entering medical school – Landau had a little bit of a scheduling conflict on his hands. He was slated to take the MCAT on Saturday, April 19, 1997. It just so happened that the Bears had advanced to the NCAA Championships that weekend at the University of Iowa.



Josh Landau was captain of Cal's men's gymnastics teams in 1997 and 1998, both of which captured the NCAA championship.

Cal won the national team title that Friday night. The next morning, Landau was sitting in a lecture hall at Iowa to take the nine-hour exam.

"I don't remember how much sleep I got that night, but it wasn't a lot," Landau recalled. "When I got done with the test, I felt like I had just crawled through the desert."

Landau, who received Cal's Neufeld Award as the graduating senior student-athlete with the highest GPA, ended up attending medical school at the University of North Carolina. One day while working out there, the school's cheerleading coach caught him in action. He immediately asked if Landau could do back flips during timeouts of basketball games. Landau ended up becoming a crowd favorite.

"He just told me to come to the games whenever I could," Landau said. "Once the word got out, the medical people were sending me out of the hospital to do it."

When the Bears' men's gymnastics program was temporarily discontinued in 2010 because of budget constraints, Landau was an influential figure in the fundraising efforts that ultimately got it reinstated.

"It re-ignited my memories of Cal and why Cal is so important to me," Landau said. "I have pictures of our national championships in my office on my wall. I have a direct responsibility to the people at Cal that made my path possible." □