

Australia's top-ranked tennis player, Sam Stosur, 26, got serious about the game alongside childhood doubles partner Grayden Moore, 28. They continue to inspire each other, even though Grayden's tennis career was halted in 2004 when an accident resulted in a profound brain injury.

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Sam Stosur &
Grayden Moore



Sam: We played tennis every week at the same club on the Gold Coast and had the same coach. We played local weekend doubles tournaments together and were as close as any 12- or 13-year-olds could be. Grayden was fun, very athletic, loved to be out there competing. And he was very good. He went to the US on a tennis scholarship – you have to be good to do that.

I wasn't spending a lot of time in Australia when I found out about the accident, but his mum and my parents were in contact. I visited him in the Gold Coast Hospital. I just knew he'd fallen off his skateboard and was not in good shape. He couldn't communicate; he was in a coma. I actually fainted when I got in there. I could feel myself going and before I knew it I was sitting in a seat, with his mum, Laurelei, holding a wet towel to my head. It obviously affected me seeing someone like that in a hospital bed with tubes in their mouth and a bandage on their head, knowing they were being kept alive by this big machine. They'd taken part of his skull out to relieve the pressure on his brain and it freaked me out. Something like that can happen in the blink of an eye and your whole life is changed.

Grayden was transferred to Sydney and I didn't see him again for a while. I couldn't communicate with him directly; I kept up with his news through mutual friends, or my parents spoke to his mum. A few years ago we had lunch where I was practising. It was amazing how far he'd come. He was walking again. He was talking. He obviously

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He's had to learn everything again, how to move, how to talk. He sometimes sounds like someone who's learnt English as a second language. He uses words that someone who's grown up speaking English wouldn't use. It all makes sense and he knows what he's talking about, but it takes him that little bit longer to get it out.

I can't imagine what it would be like to know what you were capable of and now be walking with a walking frame. I kind of went through that a couple of years ago – not to his extent by any means – but I was pretty sick for 10 months with Lyme disease and viral meningitis. I wasn't able to do what I love doing, which is play tennis. I found that hard enough. I couldn't imagine going through what Grayden has. I went from looking at someone who could do anything he wanted, to looking

wasn't back to normal but it was really impressive. Over the years we've met up every time I'm in Sydney, we've met in Melbourne, he's sent me text messages and emails letting me know when he's seen me play. He sends me tennis tips, tells me how he thinks I should play, that I should come to the net more, be more aggressive, things like that.

at an old man, almost. But it was amazing to see him go from being in hospital unconscious to where he is now. It's inspirational. He was as low as anyone could get, just hanging on to life, and now he's enjoying sporting events, hanging out with friends, having a little bit of tennis. We joke around. He gets it. I'd like to have a hit with him when I come back to Australia at the end of the year. I think he thinks he's going to beat me, so I'll have to give him a bit of a match.

Grayden: I was Sam's mixed doubles partner on the Gold Coast. She was really good with her returns and setting me up on the net. I was very impressed because she was such a good support even though she was younger than me. I would remember a lot more if I didn't have the tragedy but I do remember we used to do a running drill and Sam was really fast. Naturally, I don't think any boy would like to be beaten by a girl, especially when she's younger than he is. I don't think she would have beaten me because I was very athletic then.

I was very serious about tennis. I wanted it to become my life. I wanted to make a profession out of it and I still would want that if I didn't have the tragedy. In November 2004, when I was 23, I had my accident. I was skateboarding down a long steep hill when my board got the wobbles. I wasn't wearing a helmet because I thought I was invincible. The witnesses who called the ambulance told me I bounced on my head three times. They saw blood coming out of my ears, they couldn't find a heartbeat and they couldn't find a pulse. I was literally dead. They are surprised that I'm alive today.

I don't remember anything about the recovery. I was in a coma for about a year. When I see photos of myself in that state, there are more tubes and dressings on my body than skin. Sam was nice enough to visit me while I was in intensive care. She was so shocked that she fainted. Lucky Mum was there to catch her. There was a stage when I couldn't talk. I couldn't move my arms or legs either. My first memory is of my mum's birthday, about 18 months after the accident.

How do I feel about it? I feel absolutely demoralised and heartbroken, completely shattered, more than words can describe. I feel like life probably isn't worth living, because now my life is really nothing. It's really hard not to dwell on the past and not compare my current life to my former life, which I often do, but I always tell myself not to because it gets me in a negative frame of mind. My philosophy since the accident is to remain positive and live the remainder of my life as though I'm looking through the windscreen, not the rear-vision mirror. It's easier to say it than to do it. I'm the same person I used to be, but I'm totally different. I have a completely different outlook on life and the planet. I've learnt not to take life for granted, which so many people do and which, prior to my accident, I did too. I am doing some talks this year. I'll tell them the things I wish I'd heard prior to the accident, about precautions to take in life. I wish someone had told me I wasn't invincible.

I can't believe that Sam became the number one doubles player in the world [in 2006] and I nearly left the world. I actually did leave the world, temporarily, not permanently, surprisingly. We've gone in such different directions. It makes me so proud to know that in a tiny way, maybe I've contributed to her success, maybe about 0.01 per cent. She's an inspiration to me. It's such an honour to tell people that I used to be her mixed doubles partner and that I'm still friends with her. She is my most respected friend. I really respect everything she's achieved and how she's managed to maintain a caring relationship with me when she's had other priorities. That's been a real honour.

The last time I saw her at Rod Laver Arena she said, “Next time I see you, Grayden, we're going to have a real hit.” I'd love to hit with her, but it would make me remember the difference. It would be sad, not only for me, but understandably also sad for her. **GW**