

S2 E7: He's a Survivor

(AJ II & Isiah Dixon)

Previously recorded on Wednesday, December 20, 2017

Intro song: 'For The City'

0:37 AJ: Hey! Merry Christmas and happy holidays! This is AJ II bringing you another episode of *Max Out Time*, the gentleman sitting across from me happens to be the youngest guest on the show thus far. A 2017 St. Albans school alumnus and USC Trojan class of 2021. Isiah Dixon isn't a pro-baller or a recording artist, but the one thing you can say about this young man is, he's a survivor. Isiah, thank you for coming out today.

1:04 Isiah: Thank you for having me.

1:06 AJ: Man, it's great to see you back to your normal self. Healthy and striving. I want you to tell these people out here what your story is, and let them know who Isiah is and what 'Team Isiah' is all about.

1:17 Isiah: I played Lacrosse from 4th grade all the way up until when I was diagnosed, right after my 9th grade year. Basically, I was training for Lacrosse, and running just trying to get into shape. I noticed a couple of things, the first thing, I had a fever that lasted about two weeks or so, and also I had a random bruise appear on my leg out of nowhere. Also, I had a couple instances of blurred vision which is very out of the ordinary for me. Also, retrospectively, I realized I had been sick for a couple of months straight, so these were odd things. I ended up taking a couple visits to the emergency room, they thought I had Lyme's disease or Mono or something like that, but turns out when I was at my paediatrician, he ran some blood tests, and he was alarmed so he sent me to MedStar Georgetown University hospital. The next day I was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukaemia or ALL, which happens to be the most common form of childhood cancer.

2:28 AJ: Did that shock you initially?

2:31 Isiah: It was very shocking, I remember when the doctor came in and told me, I think we were all crying in the room, it's definitely a tough thing to deal with. It's the first thing when you think of cancer...I mean, I didn't really know much about it but I'm thinking, am I going to die? Am I going to get through this? How is this going to affect my life? So, just a lot of uncertainty around that.

2:54 AJ: When you first think of cancer, it's like whoa, how much time do I have left? It's almost as if there's a countdown. I don't think there's enough education on that subject to really know what exactly cancer is, and know what are the forms of it.

3:10 Isiah: Another thing, with the paediatric cancer, 5 % or less, a number around 5 % not a lot of all cancer research is dedicated to paediatric cancer research so there's a lot of types of paediatric cancers that are still have a very low survival rate. If I were to be diagnosed with cancer, it was one that was highly treatable so, just blessed to be here.

3:35 AJ: What happened from there once you were diagnosed, and sitting in the doctor's office, what changed initially?

3:43 Isiah: Once I was diagnosed, I had to stay in the hospital for 33 days straight, as the first phase of my treatment, and like I said this was right after my 9th grade year. I was diagnosed in June, so I stayed for the 33 days, and for the next 9 months or so were intense chemotherapy, so that involved a couple of in-patient stays, coming to the out-patient clinic multiple times a week.

4:06 AJ: And and you were there so often that you had to leave school, correct?

4:12 Isiah: That is correct, my sophomore year of high school I was home-schooled through my county's public school system, Prince George's County. That was tough, I didn't get to see my friends a lot, I couldn't play lacrosse anymore. I just felt isolated in general, aside from all the physical things that I was going through.

4:36 AJ: What are the physical things that you really go through? Because I don't think everybody out there knows this chemotherapy process.

4:43 Isiah: Really just like, not not feeling well a lot of the time, feeling nauseous, losing weight, losing your hair. I know that's that's especially tough for girls, for me, my hair wasn't that long but losing it was still tough. Just really being self-conscious about how I look, how I feel. When I did get to see the people that I knew, my friends, people from school, they treated me a little differently. I don't really blame them, it's kind oftough having someone that you care about go through something like cancer, and you don't really know how to react.

5:23 AJ: So in your everyday routine since you were at the hospital. Did people show up? You know how you watch ESPN and like My Wish and so on. Did people show up and bring you gifts or was it just family members? Take us through how you cope with everything and what people did to embrace that.

5:43 Isiah: So I was at Medstar Georgetown, and a couple of athletes from Georgetown actually came, I remember the women's basketball team came and at the time one of their assistant coaches, was the daughter of the pastor of my church so she came through, I saw her. Also, some people from the Georgetown Lacrosse team came by, and those were people who visited me while I was staying in the hospital. Also, outpatient, different sports teams would come through, the Capitals would come through, there were some some baseball players from the Nationals would come through, and I think every once in a while, even we'll get a Wizards player.

6:24 AJ: You played Lacrosse as well, how was the transition of boom! Every day, every second, you know you're thinking about Lacrosse, playing Lacrosse and everything, and then going to being in hospital, knowing that you're not going to play anymore. What was what was that feeling for you?

6:41 Isiah: Considering all the things that I had to go through, being diagnosed with cancer and going through treatment, being away from Lacrosse was definitely one of the most difficult things for me. Not only was it something that I personally enjoyed, it was also something that I could enjoy with my friends.

6:55 AJ: It's a social sport...

6:57 Isiah: Yeah, exactly. So I guess, just not not being able to interact with my friends as much. Seeing myself kind of...I mean...I was really in good shape...

7:08 AJ: I know you were. Who was leading the workouts for you? Coach Bryan or somebody?

7:13 Isiah: Coach Bryan, you know, he was no joke.

7:18 AJ: Was it your goal? Or did you have aspirations to one day go pro, the whole nine with that thing or playing in college? What was your 5 year goal with Lacrosse at that point?

7:31 Isiah: For my 9th grade year and the summer after, I was also playing for a team outside of the school called Black Wolf, a lot of my teammates actually at the time, you know lacross they are doing Lacrosse recruiting early. A lot of them were committing to division one schools and that's what I wanted to do, I wanted to play division one Lacrosse. My brother, when I was diagnosed at the time, he was freshman at Maryland University and I thought it would be perfect to go play lacrosse at University of Maryland, which is the best Lacrosse schools in the country, not too far from home.

8:02 AJ: They do, but it took tremendous courage for you to go through that process at such a young age, and going through almost a year of not seeing your friends every day, and being depicted in a different light, and knowing that you were battling something that was astronomical. Can you tell us about what inspired you, and what sparked you to go on, and push forward with this movement and this foundation that you have today?

8:32 Isiah: I was blessed, I was able to spend the night at the hospital. One of my parents was there but some people, their parents have to work and they weren't able to come to the hospital and they had to go through their chemo treatments alone. And, really just seeing a need for...I guess to improve almost improve the experience that kids can have while they are in the hospital, I think that was something I really noticed when I was going through treatment.

9:07 AJ: How did that make you feel seeing your mom and dad come in there everyday, and other kids not ever having someone by their side?

9:16 Isiah: It made me feel lucky you know? I have two amazing parents, and for them to be so supportive, and to just take time out of their busy schedules to come and spend the night with me, it made me feel good. I just felt very lucky overall.

9:36 AJ: How do you think it made your parents feel, seeing their son go through this?

9:41 Isiah: I think it was tough for sure, especially because I did have a few scares, I had pneumonia before, I had the flu. When you when you get things like pneumonia or the flu, and your immuno compromised, like I was when I was going through treatment, it's a scary thing and it's really a matter of life or death. So, if you want to beat your disease, how you are mentally is just as important as what you're doing physically. I tried to have a good mindset and my parents did, even if they were stressed out about me going through treatment, they didn't really show it.

10:20 AJ: What's the first spark in terms of starting a non-profit organization? How does that work?

10:28 Isiah: Well, like I said, just being in the hospital, you see a lot of things. Some families...obviously, medical expenses are are ridiculous nowadays. You have people worrying about the medical expense, but also you have people who just need money to come to and from the hospital, to have food for the kids in the hospital, and just like small things. Aside from the medical expenses, I was thinking, what can we do to really help these families out and their kids? So the medical thing is the only thing they have to worry about.

11:08 AJ: How do you raise the dollars?

11:11 Isiah: So, I reached out to a lot of the people from St. Albans, they were very supportive. Really, just friends and family, seeing who we can connect with, who was really willing to join our cause.

11:28 AJ: You know, being at St. Albans, I'm sure you had a couple of donations that were able to help you out in that regard right?

11:34 Isiah: Yes.

11:36 AJ: How is Team Isiah faring so far? I like it on Facebook, and you guys have shares and everything, is it is it turning out the way you would have liked it so far?

11:46 Isiah: Yes it is, so we have had the opportunity to work with Medstar Georgetown, which is the hospital that I was treated at, Sinai Hospital in Baltimore, the Children's NIH, National Institute of health, right there in Bethesda, just a couple of days ago we went to the children's hospital in Richmond, and we donated some supplies to them. We've also don work with the Howard University Hospital, recently donated to their borders babies programme.

12:19 AJ: So, does all this talk about hospitals and donations for cancer and research and everything, does that make you want to go in medicine at all?

12:30 Isiah: Well, so at USC I have a lot of friends who are pre-med, I've seen the work they have to do. My Maths and Science is not necessarily my strong suit but...

12:40 AJ: Yeah, I was going to say, you're leading up to a 'but.'

12:43 Isiah: But, I have seen the impact a great doctor can have. I've been blessed, I've had great doctors all throughout my treatment, so I see the great impact a doctor can have. I think what I would like my angle to be, whatever I end up doing as a career, I want to make enough money to donate to cancer research and non-profits, like the one that I have, Team Isiah foundation.

13:10 AJ: What's your message to individuals out there who are battling cancer?

13:17 Isiah: No matter what you are going through, just try and keep your head up, stay as positive as you can.

13:26 AJ: And to all the survivors out there like yourself, what's the process like and how should they fare going forward?

13:35 Isiah: If I can say anything to fellow survivors, I would just say, you know, you made it, kudos to you for making it through. It's definitely a tough thing that we've all gone through, but I really I feel as though, especially as a survivor, we've seen the struggles of going through cancer, I think we have a responsibility to give back in a way, and really help others out who are still going through cancer treatment.

14:08 AJ: Isiah, let me ask you about one individual in particular, James Connor, I'm sure you know his story, the former University of Pittsburgh running back who was diagnosed with what I believe was also Leukaemia, what two years back, and then came back from his battle with that. Did you did you know about his story at all?

14:31 Isiah: I did, I think he had lymphoma which is slightly different, still a blood cancer, but seeing that is very inspiring to me. And you know, even others like Craig Sager, Stuart Scott, may they rest in peace, but just seeing him able to persevere. It really showed his dedication, and his love for the sport of football to stay training, even while he was going through treatment. I saw a video of him, he was still doing all the drills (AJ: with his mask on) with his mask on. I just think that's incredible and this spring, I'm trying to play Lacrosse at USC Club Lacrosse. Seeing someone being able play in the NFL after going through that, I can do the same thing.

15:28 AJ: Well, you go to a Nike school and I graduated from an Adidas school, and our slogan is "Impossible Is Nothing" so, really if you put your mind to it, you can get there. James Connor did it, there's countless of other people who have turned nothing into something. I know you are on the right track to do that as well. You must have been looking at my cue cards because I had Craig Sanger and Stuart Scott on there and you just threw their names out there, may they rest in peace as well. I also want to segway into fight on, the UFC chosen, you boy Reggie Bush, he retired officially a couple days ago. What is it like going to school nowadays at such a storied institution?

16:12 Isiah: It really is great, I just finished my first semester, I am back home on break. It's really the opportunity to meet so many like minded people, who also had different very different experiences. I am meeting people from different continents, different states, and I really feel blessed to have the opportunity to earn such a great education at a school like USC. The people are nice, the sports are great. I really couldn't ask for anything more.

16:46 AJ: Yeah, I have watched UFC for a very long time, they always have the rah-rah football team and the heisman, front runners and everybody, and the athletics program is definitely top notch and I wanted to go there as a kid, definitely as a football player looking

up to and idolizing people like Reggie Bush, and then one of my former coaches, Deland McCullough, he is one of the running backs coach there now and if you ever seen a big rocked up dude with a football sweatsuit on, probably rocking shades as well, that's coach McCullough. He is the running backs coach now, so let him know I say what's up. Speaking of him, he always used to tell us his stories in college, he played running back Miami of Ohio, and then he went onto play for the Bengals a little while as well. Has college been all that you expected it to be thus far? You've only been there 3 or 4 months, but is it everything that you wanted?

17:46 Isiah: It's definitely lived up to expectations and I think it's exceeded them (AJ: Exceeded?). It's the people, I don't know if it's the west coast thing, people are really nice, never met nicer people in my life.

18:04 AJ: In LA?

18:05 Isiah: In LA.

18:06 AJ: Ah man, you probably haven't been in traffic yet... You gonna get some horns blown at you and names you haven't been called.

18:16 Isiah: Maybe I can't speak for LA, but I can speak for USC and people are great. That's aside from all the things that I knew would be the standard there. Great academics, great professors.

18:33 AJ: What are you studying?

18:35 Isiah: I'm a Business Administrator major with a Spanish minor actually.

18:41 AJ: Okay! Spanish minors! We repping right here, you know, I had a Spanish minor and a concentration in Spanish, you know tried to to extend my St. Albans education. I know you probably had Ms. Simon and Castellanos. (Isiah: Rusher). Oh you had Rusher too? You must've been in them advanced classes. I wasn't in them classes. Ms. Rusher only teaches AP. I remember a little something. Dad shaking his head over here. But yeah, that's awesome that you wanted to pursue Spanish, especially out there in California, there's got to be the population has got to be pretty high of Spanish speaking people out there, right?

19:29 Isiah: It is for sure, I really just think knowing Spanish or knowing another language in general is a great skill to have, especially if you want to communicate with more people, or if you want to find a job, it can't hurt for that. I am looking forward to studying abroad, maybe my junior year, so I'm very excited about all of that.

19:51 AJ: Okay, where would you want to go study abroad?

19:53 Isiah: I'm thinking Madrid, Spain.

19:57 AJ: Everyone wants to go to Spain. Hey, hey, hey, you go there only for the educational aspect, for the education, in Spanish. Madrid is where they fight bulls, they're not teaching no school over there. Remember that! You talked also about studying Business Administration, is that all sports biz for you too? Are you trying to trying to be the next Derek Jeter or the next Diddy? What's going on?

20:29 Isiah: Well, right now I'm not sure exactly what I would like to do in Sports. I think it would be really nice if I could become a sports agent, I know that's a tough field to get into, tough career to get into, but that would be the dream job. Anything in sports would be great because I know obviously, I'm not going to be a professional athlete, so I figure working in the sports business is the next best thing, and that will really keep me connected to sports, and I'll be able to grow my love for sports even more.

21:02 AJ: Man, that's surprising to hear you say that, because my boy, Christian Carter actually just wrote a piece, "African-American Agents Aim to Even the Playing Field" you should look this article up. It's basically outlining the difficulties in getting into being a sports agent as an African American both in basketball and football, so whichever sport you're trying to be an agent for, please read his article before you go any further. Keep going after your goals, and perusing that profession.

21:35 Isiah: I feel really blessed to be going to USC, to have the resources that I have, to just be able to get on the right path to becoming who I want to be.

21:44 AJ: You're right there in Hollywood, have you see any celebrities drop by or gone out to Rodeo Drive or the Walk of Fame and anything like that?

21:56 Isiah: This time out, since I was out there my first semester, I haven't see any celebrities, but a lot of luxury cars, and a lot of people who look like they have some money.

22:06 AJ: A lot of of people who look like money? If they look like money, they probably smell like money, they smell like money, they got the money. Just put it that way.

22:13 Isiah: You know, I actually did see Steve Nash at an event I was at...

22:18 AJ: That's a two time MVP!

22:20 Isiah: I just thought about that, Steve Nash, Landon Donovan the retired USA soccer player.

22:28 AJ: See there has to be more, keep them coming. You just named two icons in the sports field, soccer and basketball.

22:34 Isiah: A couple actors, I cannot name them, but I've seen a couple of people now that I think about it.

22:41 AJ: Just remember, Google is your friend, if you ever see them, get a picture with them, and get your selfie game up man! You got to have these memories that'll last forever, you're out in Hollywood!

22:56 Isiah: Yeah, I'll remember that next time.

22:58 AJ: Yeah man, but these celebrities that you saw out there, they got nothing on you. You are a real shining star and I want to thank you for coming out to *Max Out Time*. If there's any last words you want to leave out for the audience watching today? Please shout out Isiah Dixon, Team Isiah and your foundation. Just leave us with anything you'd like to say.

23:21 Isiah: Well first and foremost, I would like to really thank my parents for being very supportive of me really my whole life, but especially in these past four years or so. It was tough times, it was difficult, and I really wouldn't have gotten through it without them. So my parents, my family and friends, I'd like to shout out my foundation, the Team Isiah foundation, you can like us on Facebook - Team Isiah Foundation, we're also on Instagram, the same thing. But really, Arthur, I would like to thank you for having me here today, it really was a joy to be on the show today, so thank you.

23:59 AJ: Ah man, you got my name out in the streets, man this AJ II right here. I don't know who this cat is. No but seriously, on a serious note, thank you so much for coming on. I know we had to scramble last minute for this interview, you're tough! You're tougher than Wilbon. I can get Wilbon in here better than I can get you. But, thank you and thank you dad for bringing him as well. I just wanted to hear your story because we didn't have that overlapping period, especially in high school at St. Albans, so I wanted to get your story because I've known about it for a while now. Now we stamped it on paper with *Max Out Time*. So everyone out there, this is Isiah Dixon, Team Isiah Dixon, please go out and like, and hit the follow button on Team Isiah foundation. Continue to subscribe to *Max Out Time* with AJ II on iTunes or you can follow me on SoundCloud as well, add my social media pages, you already know, it's *Max Out Time* with AJ II, and this is AJ II and I'm out!

25:01 Outro Song: 'For The City'

25:28--END--

[Max Out Time W/ AJ II](#)