

YOU SHOULD KNOW ...

By Susan C. Ingram

Erin Konheim Mandras

The irony is not lost on Erin Konheim Mandras. The wife, mother of three, soccer coach, motivational speaker and self-titled "Mommy Blogger" has a son with severe food allergies that, in turn, caused a feeding disorder. Mandras, as a college soccer star, developed anorexia, a dangerous eating disorder. So, mother and son share a difficult relationship with food.

Today, Erin, 33, who lives in Pikesville with her husband, is healthy, successful and busy with her sons. She blogs at kickthescale.com and speaks publicly, sharing her unusual story with others in hopes of helping them through their own food disorder challenges.

Mandras grew up in Bloomfield, Mich., with two brothers and got into sports early.

"I had an older brother who played soccer, so I always tried to keep up with him," she said.

And keep up she did. Recruiters came knocking when she was a high school sophomore. Accepting a full-ride scholarship at Michigan State University, she majored in elementary education and kept up a 4.0 GPA while excelling at soccer. But her emphasis on perfection spiraled into an unhealthy body image and deprivation diet, eventually leading to passing out in her car during a snowy ride home one weekend. She totaled her SUV and was lucky to have survived.

Recovering from anorexia wasn't easy. Put on the injured list, she stopped playing soccer but came back in her junior year, strength training with a coach and working on her confidence.

By senior year she had reached a healthy weight, attitude and body image. As team captain she set an MSU record for career assists, and the team qualified for the NCAA Tournament.

"I ended on a very high note," she said. I might have lost a lot of opportunities those couple years, but I left feeling very good about my final playing days."

From college she went straight to work as a women's soccer coach, first at MSU, then moved to Baltimore in 2007, coaching at Towson University and Loyola University Maryland before leaving to be a full-time mom. In 2015, Mandras was inducted into the Michigan Jewish Sports Hall of Fame and most recently received the 2017 Nell C. Jackson Outstanding Alumna Award.

When did your son's food disorder surface?

He was diagnosed at 17 months with a feeding disorder, but he was diagnosed with food allergies at 14 months. He had developed an aversion to food because of the way it made him feel while we were feeding him foods he was allergic to.



Why did you start blogging?

When he was admitted to Mount Washington Pediatric Hospital, that's when I started writing, while I sat there and watched him in this high-chair learn how to eat and trust food and gain weight. His issues inspired me to come out and help people in this area that is so prevalent, yet not spoken about. Athletes, non-athletes, men, women. The statistics of eating disorders are crazy, and yet it still carries such a stigma. I felt by sharing my story, other people could benefit and relate to it more than just hearing facts, data and information. If you can just save one degree, athletic career or a life, it's worth it.

How do you stay positive?

It's very challenging. It's a journey that we're going on — a new normal. You go through a grieving process, sad that he's missing out on things. But then he's the happiest, most athletic, coordinated, excited child. For somebody who had an eating disorder and food was a central focus of my life — and in our culture everything is based around food and meals and holidays — we work every single day at trying to redirect the focus away from food to walking and biking and being active. It's just finding different things that we're not accustomed to, to enjoy life as a family and to keep him safe. J

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