

A Servant's Heart Scholarship Essay

Three minutes left of the game. The Blazers are down by one basket. Kylie is dribbling the ball down the court. She bounce passes it to Kara—swish. I jump up in the air, “Way to go Kara! Nice pass Kylie!” Hustling back on defense, their smiles glistened. One more basket and we will win the game. The Panthers have the ball they are taking it down the court. WOOSH. Colin appears out of nowhere. He snatches the ball and heads toward the basket. The court is clear. Colin takes a quick glance at the hoop. The ball leaves his hands, hits the backboard and falls into the basket!

The Blazers win the game!

After the game, the coach and I huddled the team together.

“On the count of three, let’s shout good game Panthers,” coach Dan whispered.

“One, two, three, good game Panthers!” we all yelled together.

“Now go get in line and shake the other team’s hand,” I said leading them over to the sideline.

The Blazers and Panthers lined up to give each other kudos on a great game.

“Nice job,” “Nice basket,” “sorry about pushing you,” I heard the Panthers fervidly say to the Blazers and the Blazers replying with “thank you,” “good luck at your next game,” and “good job.”

“Huh,” I thought to myself, “most teams, after losing a game, do not say ‘good job’ or ‘sorry for pushing you.’ The winning team usually does not wish the opponent team good luck in future games. During my games and races, most teams grumble good job, while looking at their feet secretly wishing they could have a rematch if they lost. If they won, they usually boasted in their glory.” Right then I realized that these groups of kids are not like most teams. They embody sportsmanship and respect. They are Special Olympic athletes.

I decided to start volunteering for the Special Olympics after my sister, Kara, who has Down syndrome, got involved. I have always enjoyed practicing basketball with her and her friend Kelly. Once the basketball season started, I thought that it would be fun to volunteer with their team. When I walked into the gym, the kids were running around, shooting baskets, and dribbling. I was nervous that the athletes would not be comfortable working with me—they had no idea who I was. Only knowing my sister and Kelly, I started passing and shooting with them until practice started. After about two minutes, two girls approached me and asked for my name and introduced themselves. Then, a boy with Down syndrome came up to me, said hello and gave me a hug. He then took my hand and led Kara, Kelly, and I to join the rest of the kids. He made me feel like I fit right in.

At the start of practice, the athletes lined up for their warm up. With radiant smiles on their faces, they raced down to the other side of the gym. The next time, they made me race them. Lining up on the line with the other kids, I was ready to race.

“On your mark, get set, go!” Coach Dan said.

I took off but I was immediately passed by three of the kids. They touched the wall on the other side of the gym and made it back before me. We repeated this ten times.

Out of breath, they came up to me and said, “we beat you, but you are the fourth fastest, which is good.” I laughed, “Thanks. You guys are fast!”

After warming up, it was time for drills—dribbling, shooting, passing. While the coach was setting up, he had me explain each drill. During the explanation, the kids’ eyes were glued to me, watching my hands as I demonstrated a proper bounce pass, how to dribble, and how to play defense. They were imbuing every word I said. They performed each drill with finesse—like professionals. At the end of practice, while I was cleaning up—picking up jerseys and gathering the basketballs—Sean, one of the boys on the team, came up to me gazing at his feet.

“Good practice today Sean!” I said giving him a high five.

“Thank you for practice, will you be here next week?” he replied.

“Of course I will! I’ll see you next week!”

After just one practice and one game, I knew I was making a difference in these kids lives—teaching them new drills, helping them perfect their skills, and cheering them on. I connected to each basketball virtuoso that was on the court. I was helping them become successful at a game they love. Most importantly, however, what I was providing them was commensurate to what they have provided me. They taught me to take full advantage of the opportunities I have in life, whether it be academic or athletic. Practice after practice, game after game, the athletes came prepared to learn and reveal their improvements. They demonstrate how listening and fully engaging in each practice will enhance talents. Through their smiles, hugs, and laughs, they have taught me to enjoy life and to stop worrying. The energy used to worry about hardships and competition needs to be redirected to overcoming those hardships and working towards making myself a better person and athlete.

These young ladies and gentlemen do not let a disability get in their way. It is important to build each other up because everyone has something to offer to this world. Service involves a quid pro quo relationship. It alters the life of the volunteer along with the lives of those being served. These athletes have a regard for others that is exemplary. By volunteering with the Special Olympic basketball program, I was able to gain a better appreciation for living the Golden Rule. Service does not just give one the opportunity to help others. It gives one the opportunity to learn from others.