

What Being Tall Means to Me

By Paul Kolacki Jr.

The gym went quiet when our setter let the ball fly between his hands, right onto his head. It took one error before the team spiraled: shoulders slumped, voices faded, and the ball was attracted directly to the net. Losing wasn't just on our scoreboard, but in our mindset! In my freshman year, my biology teacher was the volleyball coach. Because I was six feet tall at the time, Mr. Roberts invited me to try out for the team. I lacked experience and didn't make the cut. Instead of walking away, I accepted his offer to become a volunteer team manager. I attended every practice and game, tracking stats and trends. More importantly, I learned how to lead. I translated numbers into adjustments and pointed out strengths others overlooked.

During this frustrating match, my team became disheartened by their mistakes. I stepped in, not to correct technique, but to reset perspective. I encouraged and reminded our setter, "Every ball is a new ball." Plays grew smarter and communication returned. We won! I realized leadership isn't about control; it's about maintaining clarity, logic, and confidence when others lose it.

Before high school, my height did not serve me. I was vertically challenged as a gymnast for many years. I had to work much harder to accomplish the same skills as my shorter teammates. I stood head and shoulders above them in photos, but I came up short consistently on skills, scores, and awards. Joining high school volleyball was a welcome change for me, and it was all due to my height.

As I practiced alongside the team, I improved. This eventually earned me a spot on the roster! I combined positivity, data, and initiative to serve the team. My confidence rose along with my height and my grades! In the future, I hope to continue leading the same way. I hope to use analytical insight to guide decisions, and optimism to unite people around solutions.

I am applying for this scholarship to bridge the financial gap in pursuing my Bachelor of Science degree and eventually a Masters degree. It would allow me to focus on academic excellence and research without excessive debt. This scholarship represents an investment in my potential to eventually impact my community in a positive way.

I believe I am a strong candidate due to my academic record, and my leadership skills that I developed as a volunteer volleyball team manager and player, as well as in my club chess tactician role. In addition, I was thrilled to have volunteer opportunities in

FBLA. While I helped others, I learned from and enjoyed conversations with the ones I helped! My skills of problem solving with a positive attitude and empathy will help to serve my community.

As somebody who has always excelled at math, I am curious about the world of statistics and I love learning. This has led me to an interest in data analytics, statistics, and business, as well as AI. The combination of my prior math and business and ethics courses will help me to analyze and hopefully improve upon fields such as public health, economics, government, etc.

Throughout my journey, I have learned resilience and determination. This helped me to excel despite having ADHD and a slow graphomotor processor (which makes it difficult to physically write). I am continuing my love of volleyball as a six-foot-almost-three-inch “middle” with an awesome blocking ability on the varsity team! I believe my background, dedication, and passion align with the community service mission of this scholarship and truly appreciate your consideration.