

My name is Ryan Hanan and I just finished my eighth and final season with the Wooster Generals wheelchair basketball team. This team and the interscholastic wheelchair basketball league completely transformed my school experience, and I am so incredibly thankful for the league and the opportunities it has given me and so many other disabled student athletes.

From a young age I was always very interested in anything to do with sports, but was never able to truly compete on a level playing field. I tried playing stand up basketball, and while I enjoyed it, it was clear that I would not be able to keep up with my peers, and that for me, playing basketball or any other sport at a high level would be virtually impossible. At that point, I never would have pictured myself finishing off my senior year of high school as a five time wheelchair basketball state champion and a two time All Ohioan.

Back in 2015, when the team at Wooster High School was first established and started practicing, it became immediately apparent that this was different. I was no longer being held back and was actually able to keep up with the other athletes, which was new to me. Finally having the ability to play a sport where I knew the only things holding me back were things that were fully within my control; and knowing that if I practiced and invested enough time and effort into this sport that I could succeed and be competitive at a high level was incredibly exciting for me. With Wooster being the first school district to offer wheelchair basketball, the first year was mostly practices and learning the ropes, but even still I could feel myself falling more and more in love with this sport every day.

The next year, with the addition of another school-based team, everything started to sink in and feel more official. I was now part of a school-based sports team, in an interscholastic league, going up against other schools in official wheelchair basketball games, something I never would have imagined myself having the ability to do. I had never pictured myself being able to play sports competitively, and now I was playing a role on a successful team while representing my school.

Watching the league grow and progress as the years went on was really exciting to see. The league continued to get more competitive, and more disabled students were getting a chance to play and represent their schools through athletics. Playing against new teams and watching the other students be so excited to have a chance to be involved in a school-based sport never got old. As more teams got involved, games continued to get closer and more competitive, and the league continued to get more fun and exciting.

Having wheelchair basketball gave me something to do and got me out of the house. I had motivation to work towards something. Had a school-based wheelchair basketball team not been available to me, I would not have done much to stay physically active or healthy. I'm not sure how I would have spent my time if I wasn't working towards getting better at wheelchair basketball and striving to do well competitively in the league. Having these athletic goals to work towards served a large role in making me feel just like any other student athlete.

For me, I think that is the most important part about having an interscholastic wheelchair basketball league. Giving disabled students the chance to be included and be a part of a team lets them feel just like any other kid, and offering wheelchair basketball should be a no-brainer for

schools across Ohio and the United States. I am incredibly thankful that I have been able to be a part of this league, and have loved every second of contributing to a successful team. I will never forget the experiences I have had, or the friends and memories I have made while playing wheelchair basketball. I hope that in the coming years, the league continues to grow and succeed, and more students are given a chance to play. Being given a chance to play in an interscholastic league changed my life, and I am certain that many other disabled student athletes feel the exact same way.