

Photo by: Hailey Hendry

# Freshman kills stereotypes, bullying

## Lew uses birth defect as motivation on the court, in life

During the pink-out game, freshman Nyajuol Lew sends the ball back over the net. The reserve team played the freshmen team this match for breast cancer awareness.

**SIERRA ROSEBY** Reporter  
Keep your head up and notice the intensity in her eyes.

Then, if you must, look lower. See the slight limp as she runs. While Freshman Nyajuol Lew would rather not acknowledge it, yes, that's a prosthetic right leg. She has worn various kinds since infancy.

After Lew was born, part of her leg, which had failed to form completely during her mother's pregnancy, had to be amputated. At a young age she didn't think twice about it, but as she grew older, questions came to mind.

"I remember asking why I have to wear this and no one else, and my mom would only say 'it's just a birth defect,'" Lew said.

Beginning in elementary school, Lew has fallen victim to bullying and has found it difficult to fit in just because she was considered different.

"When you call someone different, I view it as someone who loves being themselves," Lew said. "I don't view it as a bad thing."

While she was once the girl who was impeccably comfortable in her own skin, an internal battle broke out between who she viewed herself as versus the thoughts of others.

"It made me mad," Lew said. "I was bullied so much that in eighth grade, I had to see my counselor every week. People think that stuff doesn't hurt me, but it did; I started to get anger issues. Luckily, my counselor helped me come up with solutions. I didn't want to bring my middle school attitude to high school."

During middle school, Nyajuol played volleyball for the fun of it. However, she never decided to take it further and try out for her school team because she didn't think she was good enough.

At the end of her eighth-grade year, Lew reached out to her older sister in regards to an ambitious urge to play volleyball her freshman year of high school.

"My sister told me that if I wanted to play sports, just go out and do it, don't care about what others think," Lew said.

Last June, Lew crossed a psychological threshold when she began going to conditioning. As a result of her sudden desire, she became an active member of the school's reserve volleyball team. Although, she's still

striving to achieve a varsity level position, just being part of the team constitutes as a precious victory.

At the start, Lew underestimated the challenge of playing an explosive sport with a prosthetic leg. However, after getting knocked down some, she discovered ways to compensate for her leg and persevere.

"I have to work 10 times harder than everyone," Lew said. "In practice they'll [teammates] say things like, 'my legs hurt,' but they don't know pain the way I do. This brace is tight on me and it squeezes my leg. So when I play, it hits hard against my leg and causes blisters."

If it's one thing Lew is certain of, it's that she doesn't want to be anybody's charity case. A prime example of her feisty attitude was displayed during summer conditioning.

"When we would have to do running exercises like jumping and stairs, it was hard because the brace restricts you," Lew said. "It got to the point where I participated without it. Even though I wasn't suppose to have it off, I can for an hour a day."

Lew has developed the kind of relationship with her team to where she feels that she can tell them nearly anything. Her favorite aspect about the team is that if she is having an off day, her team uplifts her, and if her team is feeling defeated, Lew finds a way to uplift them.

"I love playing with her," senior Jessica Lieb said. "She's the one who gets the team engaged and upbeat. She's so funny too. The 'best supporter' award goes to her."

Head coach Luis Vargas recalls a proud moment for both him and Lew when they beat Omaha North in September.

"Nyajuol played the whole game in the front and after she tells me.... 'The majority of the girls on that team always bullied me in middle school, and we beat them,'" Vargas said.

At the girls' last practice, the coach asked each of them what their personal goal for that year was, and Lew's was to prove all those wrong who said she couldn't do it.

"I would consider my leg a strength because it serves as a motivation for me to keep going," Lew said. "When I have it on and go out on the court, I take on more pride because they think I can't when I'm ready to prove them wrong."



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