



MEET THE FIVE



Morgan Smith
Smith stands at 5'1 and plays as a Point Guard.



Elise Grimshaw
Grimshaw stands at 5'7 and plays as a Shooting Guard.



Olivia Graeser
Graeser stands at 5'9 and plays as a Power Forward.

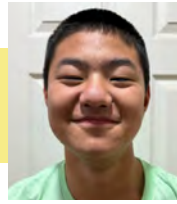


Addy Jones
Jones stands at 5'8 and plays as a Power Forward.



Courtney Epllin
Epllin stands at 5'8 and plays as a Shooting Guard

FINDING A PLACE TO BELONG



OPINION Eric Taylor

I'm not like anyone else. I'm broken and have a brace on my leg.

I was born with Cerebral Palsy. A physical disability that has permanently affected my daily lifestyle day in and day out. It left me wishing to do more, to be normal. However, why does that matter?

I've always been passionate about sports and always will. From the first time I watched a Cardinals game at Busch Stadium to analyzing meaningless stats, sports is where I belong. I've always been told that I couldn't do everything physically as well as everyone else, and they would be right, I won't be as good as able-bodied people, and that hurts to hear. That doesn't mean that I don't love my life. Even with my disability, I still managed to find happiness in sports, and I wouldn't change anything about myself.

I didn't always believe that. Back when I first started participating in sports at 5 years old on my Elementary school playground, I felt jealous of people who were always stronger and faster than me at everything. I wanted to keep up with all the boys my age at running or kickball, but it seemed like a losing battle. Especially at that age, being the fastest runner mattered a lot, and if you're the slowest, that brings you down mentally.

I tried figuring out ways to get faster and better and sports, and that's when physical therapy entered my life during second grade. Months of doing constant exercises and checkups, every single week. It was one of the most boring and annoying things in my childhood. Was it worth it? Did all that time push me to greater heights?

Yes, but it didn't matter. To me, I was still the same slow kid on that elementary school blacktop, not fitting in with anyone.

Year after year, sports felt more like a chore, not something I actually looked forward to. After constant experience with me not fitting in with sports, I eventually called it quits on joining a sport again during fourth grade.

Wait a minute, that's not how the story is supposed to go, is it? This is supposed to be a story about perseverance and finding happiness in sports, not giving up the minute it goes wrong. Well, just wait.

I wish I could tell you that I felt happier about quitting sports, but I ended up feeling lonelier than before. I couldn't believe it, but was it true that being on a

team gave me the social life that I needed? At that moment, my life was a constant back and forth from school to homework, day in and day out, and suddenly, I was missing the benefits sports gave me.

Although I couldn't bear not fitting in again on a team or being the worst out of everyone. It was against my perfectionist nature, and this trend continued over and over for a few months, until I found my community during fifth grade, DASA.

DASA stands for the Disabled Athletes Sports Association, and that is where I started finding true happiness in the world of sports. They offered a variety of different sports from swimming to track and field, all the way to rock climbing.

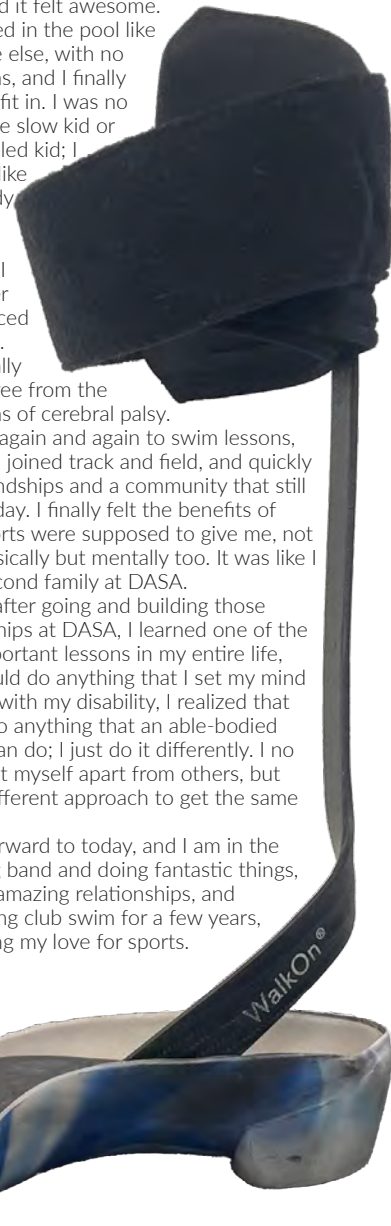
When I first entered that swimming pool to begin my first swim lesson with DASA, it was like I had entered a whole new world. I was surrounded by a room of disabled athletes, ranging from cerebral palsy kids, like myself, to amputees, and anything in between. Finally, I didn't feel like the outsider in the room, and it felt awesome.

I jumped in the pool like everyone else, with no limitations, and I finally felt like I fit in. I was no longer the slow kid or the disabled kid; I was just like everybody else, and that was a feeling I had never experienced in my life. I had finally broken free from the limitations of cerebral palsy.

I went again and again to swim lessons, and even joined track and field, and quickly built friendships and a community that still exists today. I finally felt the benefits of what sports were supposed to give me, not only physically but mentally too. It was like I had a second family at DASA.

Then, after going and building those relationships at DASA, I learned one of the most important lessons in my entire life, that I could do anything that I set my mind to. Even with my disability, I realized that I could do anything that an able-bodied person can do; I just do it differently. I no longer set myself apart from others, but took a different approach to get the same results.

Fast forward to today, and I am in the marching band and doing fantastic things, building amazing relationships, and even doing club swim for a few years, continuing my love for sports.



they just didn't have that confidence in their younger years."

And so, they held strong throughout the changes in their team's structure, continuing to support one another like they always had.

"[I just knew] that whenever I missed a shot or messed up a play, they still had my back," Grimshaw said. "They encouraged me, and I [knew] that I could rely on every teammate I have on the bench and on the floor."

And the support they give to one another is a great reflection of the connections they've built and the friendships they have with each other.

"I would say it's definitely more than basketball," Jones said. "Lucky me, I've been playing with a lot of them since I was in third grade. If we were playing other sports, not all of us would have connected. But I'm really happy we did all connect, because I feel like we match really well, and thrive off each other."

Today, these five are still playing. This final season, the five are now in their senior year, and they're all working to end it on a good note, including their coach.

"I hope they go out and just leave it all out on the court," Rampley said. "I don't want them to have any regrets... I think they're ready to have a great senior year. We're adding more freshmen to our team this year, so I hope they can be leaders for those freshmen who are coming in."