

Tiny But Mighty

By: Madeline T.

I arrive at practice early, feeling excited but nervous with butterflies flying around in my stomach. As I walk in through the big heavy metal door, I am greeted by many familiar friends but many strange faces as well. I am surrounded by the recognizable smell of sweat drifting around the room from girl to girl. As I see the volleyball nets being set up by unrecognizable coaches, I feel even more butterflies in my stomach but still that same excitement lingering. My eyes scan the lobby looking for my friends from last year. I see many girls standing and talking to girls sitting on benches. When I spot my friends, I walk over and say my rounds of hellos. Then while talking to some of my friends, I observe coaches, big and small leading girls on the court. I follow. I give myself a pep talk, reminding myself that this is my sport and "I got this." I hear a coach call us all to meet on the middle court. I follow like everyone else. I feel like just another M&M in a jar of M&Ms. The coach talks to us and reminds me of something that I almost forgot about...

It's still tryouts. My stomach feels like it is twisting into a little ball. I then remember the conversation with my mom telling me that you made the club but now you have to try out for a team. There will be three teams I remember her telling me. Red, blue, and white. Red was the best, blue was the second best, and white was the third best team (the worst team). I knew I wouldn't make red because I am way too short. However, I still had a chance at blue. My brain snaps me back into reality as they split us up by age group and then into position groups. I got into the setting group and I am surrounded by giants. These girls can set the ball way higher than I can. I feel like a toddler in a sea of professional basketball players. Then, I realize that these are not just girls trying out for 12u. It's also 13u girls trying out. Then, the worries appear. "What if they think I'm too short?" "What if they think I'm in 13u?" These thoughts continue and even grow more powerful throughout the whole night. I performed good sets and some not-so-solid sets. No matter how hard I tried I could never set it as high or as far as the 13us. I felt myself losing confidence.

After a couple days of tryouts, I feel like a fish in a giant ocean. I am a midget in the land of giants. I'm embarrassed to walk in with my midget mother compared to the seven foot tall other mothers. I realized after a couple days of trying out that the coaches don't know who I am, and that's a problem. I walk into the gym on the second to last night of tryouts. I'm starting to get a feel for the routine, so as soon as I walk in, I go to the middle courts and set my bag down on the wall. I watch as the older girls help set up the net and then hustle into the middle court where a coach is asking us to circle up. They split us up by age group, and I assume we are just going to go to the position we think we are going to play. I was wrong. Instead, we stayed with our age groups and went from court to court doing drills and mini scrimmages. That's when I noticed for the first time that coaches are walking around with ipads evaluating us. I got nervous again but just told myself to try my hardest. Near the end of practice, the coach tells us that we are going to be scrimmaging. The coach, who I am assuming is the 12u coach, tells us to line up. She gives us a number and tells us where to go. I got the number 2. Immediately after she

split us up, I noticed that all of the players who were big and tall and I guess good were on one court. The small players were all on the court I was on. I was furious. There was not a single girl shorter than approximately 5 feet tall on the other court. But at least I stood out.

I decided to forget about the other players and focus on myself. I wanted to be the best possible (short, tiny, midget, and small) volleyball player I could be. I may be tiny but I am mighty. It was the last day of tryouts. Everything came down to this. This was my last opportunity to stand out. Even though I still don't think they know my name, I dive for balls (I even have the bruises to prove it.). I call the ball. I do anything I can to try to stand out. Then at the end of practice, the dreaded scrimmage began. Like the day before, we line up and are assigned a team. This time I notice that the coach actually does it fairly. I am with tall girls and short girls. I am feeling so nervous at this point. The scrimmage is the last thing that we were going to do. It was my last chance to shine. As the coach throws in the ball, all of my nervous thoughts evaporate. All I can think about is that ball. I set my feet one slightly in front of the other and got down low. I can feel my legs burning but I ignore the pain. I make good high passes after another, and I end the day feeling on top of the world.

I woke up in my hotel room in Austin. I check my phone like I usually do in the mornings. I noticed I had gotten an email. I was curious about who would write on Thanksgiving Break. As I open my email, the butterflies return to my stomach immediately. I paused before opening the email and took a deep breath. I opened the email and read it. Immediately, I saw the exact words I had been looking for, the Blue team. I was so happy that all that hard work had paid off. I may be tiny, but I sure am mighty.