

Anthony “Tony” Marra

EMG-101-06

September 23, 2021

Unified as Champions

I stand there at the starting line at Durfield Mass, ready to run, wearing my blue and white track uniform. This was for a state championship, so a lot was on the line. And I tripped at the start of the race. When I tripped the other racers stopped for a second asked me if I was okay then I got back up, said “Yeah I’m okay” and began to run, despite my trip, I got back up and pushed myself further than I had in a while, I may have not gotten a medal, but I had my fastest overall time for a race. For this wasn’t a simple 400-meter race around a track this was a unified race and one that I wouldn’t forget.

Unified sports is a collaboration between high school sports and the Special Olympics to let kids with special needs compete in high school varsity sports. However, it wasn’t just limited to them if you could compete in varsity sports you could compete in unified. That wasn’t to take away from those kids some of them are great athletes in their own right despite having special needs. In Massachusetts, they offered a few sports but the big ones were Unified Track and Field and Unified Basketball. I participated in both sports which were offered at my high school: Wahconah Regional High School.

Unified Basketball took place during the fall it was the first sport I participated in. During the season the coach gave me the nickname “Magic Marra” mostly because of one game where I scored the game-winning basket and scored 30 points out of the 50. We faced most of the teams across the region but the most consistent opponent was Mt. Greylock high school I remember everything from the scoreboard to all of the bright red banners they had across the gymnasium the feeling of the crowds as they cheered on both sides no matter whether we were in the lead or behind. I remember the red court of the Mounties, the Wahconah blue gym, or even the yellow of Chicopee Comp. for a Western Mass Jamboree. It was a sport that a lot of people played and we became a better team because of it.

Unified Track was the bigger sport of the two as most seasons the team was larger than the basketball most years. I would also say it is a lot more fun with more people and a state championship that unified basketball didn't have. But just running outside talking with friends practicing with the heavy shot put or the light turbo-javelin is all extremely fun. But when we won the state championship the entire team was excited you could look at all of their faces and just see pure joy and elation from the whole team, and when we got back to Dalton the group of fire trucks made a makeshift parade for us, which felt extremely special after the fun season we had.

Unified sports is special because it gave kids who never really had a chance at being an athlete the chance to like my older brother got was great and the same for all of the other students from my school. It gave them a chance to shine when they hadn't before and just being a part of it was special. Whether it was helping out whenever I could or even doing great in events like the 400m

and the Long jump. It was a group of experiences that forged a new group of champions and one that I won't forget