

MOST COURAGEOUS ATHLETE AWARD

ALEX KRAHULIK

2017

Alex is a senior attending Penn Manor High School. He is a starter on the varsity basketball and volleyball teams, but only after years of setbacks, painful procedures, determination, and an unbreakable passion for sports. He was born with club feet, and he spent his first year in a series of corrective casts and braces. He had his first surgery at 11 months, shortly after he had learned to stand with his right foot upside-down. The doctors explained that their goal was to get his feet to pain-free and functional, but he would never have normal feet.

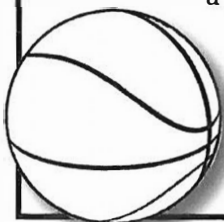
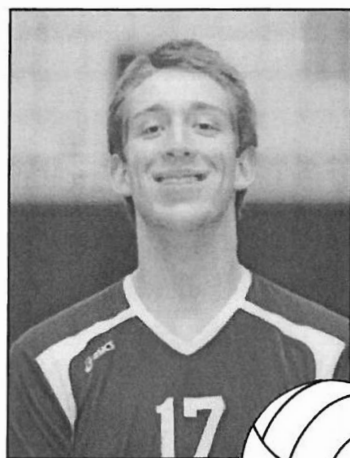
With misshapen feet, and custom orthotics in his shoes, he grew up loving to run and jump and play. He started playing soccer and basketball at age three and embraced all sports opportunities with gusto. In elementary school, his love for the games and his amazing use of those very unique feet led him to excel at soccer, basketball and lacrosse.

By 5th grade, Alex began experiencing pain in his knees, shins, ankles, and feet. By fall of his 7th grade year, Alex was in a frustrating cycle of stress fractures, healing, and immediate new fractures. Throughout this time, he attended every basketball practice, every basketball game, and was voted team captain by his teammates, but spent the entire season on the sidelines. The source of the recurring fractures was ultimately identified as a damaged growth plate in his ankle, which resulted in his right tibia being curved instead of straight, and 2" shorter than the left. The corrective treatment required surgically breaking the tibia and fibula, and embedding an erector set into his ankle with four bolts protruding through his skin, attached to an external fixator. For the next 6 months, adjustments were manually done 3 times a day in order to straighten and lengthen his leg. He did not play any sports for two years, but never missed a practice or game.

Finally returning as a freshman, Alex was determined to return to competitive basketball. Both his surgeon and his physical therapist warned him that it was not likely that he would be able to regain his former prowess and resume his former goals. However, that fall, he was one of three freshmen who were asked to play up on the JV team, and he was subsequently named team captain. As a sophomore, he added volleyball to his repertoire, and quickly established himself as a leader both on and off the court, and was a starter on the team that won runner-up in the state volleyball championship in 2016.

Alex's coach states that "Alex doesn't look at setbacks like everyone else; he sees how they make him stronger... He has never let his surgeries or struggles be an excuse for not working hard. Alex often pushes the hardest in conditioning, practice, and matches. This drive, along with his enthusiasm and leadership, has pushed his teammates toward success. Alex brings out the best in everyone else due to his positive attitude and friendly demeanor. He has earned the respect and admiration of his teammates and coaches. He is the heart and soul of the team."

Alex's life-long adventure with unusual physical setbacks, his determination to overcome them, and his love of helping people, have all led to his current goal of serving others through a medical career. At Penn Manor, he has a 4.02 cumulative GPA, and he plans to attend Duquesne University to become a Physician Assistant.



**The Susquehanna Valley Chapter of the PA Sports Hall of Fame
and the Family of William Mable Congratulates
Alex Krahulik as the 2017 Most Courageous Athlete.**