

KWANZ's Young Achiever - Ollie

WRITTEN BY Ollie (KWANZ Teenager)

Hi, I'm Ollie and I'm in Year 12 at Matamata College. I love sport & it literally gets me out of bed every day. I was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis when I was 8 years old. It took almost a year for the specialists to diagnose me as I presented with Crohn's disease symptoms first & then after my "scopes" plus a conversation with my Dad who has AS (ankylosing spondylitis) plus my tests coming back HLA-B27 positive, they re-diagnosed me with Enthesitis related Arthritis .

My arthritis mainly affects my hips, knees & feet but as it is an autoimmune disease so it affects my entire body & causes chronic fatigue. For years it was physically impossible for me to do any sport & some days I couldn't get out of bed.



I started Athletics when I was 12 years old. I had a great coach who helped me throw the shotput & discus so it took some pressure off my knees.

Some days I would have to go & sit down between throws as my knees hurt too much.

I started breaking all of our school records & over the next few years I won 6 medals at the Colgate Games. When I was 14 years old I was awarded the Nick Willis scholarship for most outstanding athlete at the Colgate Games as I got gold, silver & bronze in throwing & the 100m.

Since then I have been the Thames Valley, Waikato & North Secondary school champion in both shotput & discus & then in 2019 I won the National title at the NZ secondary school Champs in the Junior Boys Discus. We had awful weather & I still threw over 52m, so I was really happy with that.

Last year I got 5 trophies at our college sports awards for swimming, athletics & volleyball. I also received the trophy for the most outstanding athlete at our school. My goal is to get that again this year.

I started volleyball (against medical advice) in October 2018. I was selected for the Waikato U15 team in December at The NZ Interprovincial (IPC) where we won the tournament & I made the Star 7 tournament team.



My proudest moment was when I selected for the, NZ Youth Men's team (U18). They told me that if I wanted to make the NZ team I had to swap hands as my position required a "right handed person". I spent the whole summer practicing with my opposite hand & I made the team! (I still throw the shot & discus with my left hand). We went to Florida to compete at the USA HP champs, which was the most amazing experience. I had to register my meds with the team & had them in special pouches for customs.

I've since represented the Waikato in U17s & then again in U15s (for the 2nd time) where I was named in the Tournament team again. In 2020 I was selected in the NZ Youth men's team again to travel to Thailand

but it was cancelled due to Covid19.

I competed in my first Beach volleyball tournament at the NZ age group champs in February where I represented the Waikato & we won the Silver medal. We also did really well at the NZ secondary school champs & so after that I was selected in the NZ U17 beach development squad. We were going to Australia, but this got cancelled due to covid19 as well.

I am currently playing for the Hamilton Men's Volleyball team which will (hopefully) go to the NZ Club champs at the end of September.



I am also part of the NZ Elite training camps which happen every second weekend at Mount Maunganui & I will trial for the NZ Junior men's volleyball team in October (this is for the U20s & I'm still only 16 years old so fingers crossed!). This will be a two year

commitment. So I know I have to really look after my body & listen to my Mum, (she made me put that!!).



In February 2021 I was selected for the U20 NZ indoor volleyball team. I also won a silver medal in the NZ Secondary School beach volleyball competition. This meant 8 games in blistering heat over two days.

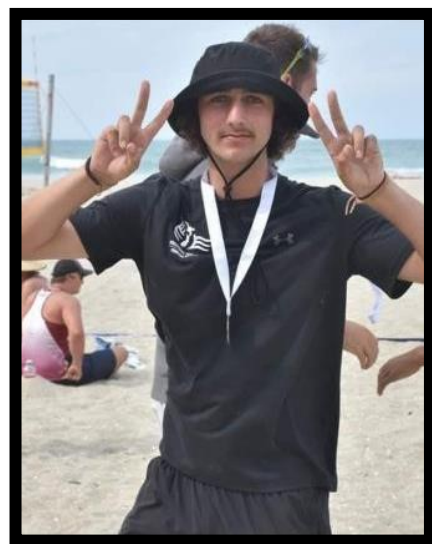
My Specialists have warned me that I may not be able to keep playing volleyball due to the impact on my knees & we were all surprised with my scan results. I have actually developed muscle tissue around my knee joints which I didn't have before. I just kept pushing through the pain to accomplish this.

They are now telling me to, "Keep doing what I'm doing", as it is making my body & mind stronger.

Sometimes I find it amusing when other athletes complain about

being, "sore & tired" at training sessions. Some of them have no idea!

When I leave school I'd like to study & work in Community Sport & recreation, focusing on keeping kids with disabilities as active as possible. This will hopefully still allow me to train & compete at the highest level for as long as possible. I never take it for granted & make the most of each opportunity.



Please remember every journey is unique to that person. Sharing a personal story is an act of kindness; it lets others know they are not alone.

Please check with your child's Specialist or GP if this article has generated medical questions for you.

Disclaimer

The opinions expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the view of Kids With Arthritis NZ Charitable Trust.