

Daniel Mendez, El Asombroso

By Mark Hill

This year, I have had the privilege to meet an extraordinary student, athlete, and fellow Christian named Daniel Mendez. "Dani," as we refer to him, has overcome challenges this year I could never contemplate doing.

Dani has inspired me to face the challenges of going to a new school. Whereas I am attending a new school and learning Spanish I and II at the same time, he is learning a new language in another country without classes to prepare him. While I left all my friends at my old school, Dani has left his friends and family. When I look at my difficulties, I see his too, and I realize just how small my little problems are compared to his. As I see Dani trying his hardest in school and in practice, I remember that I should try my hardest too.

When I first heard about this contest, I can't say that I immediately thought of Dani. I was looking for my inspiration elsewhere, such as a coach or pro athlete. But when I asked Dani about his life, what he told me not only surprised me but grew my awe and appreciation for him. Dani was born six weeks premature, his collarbone was broken, and he had two major illnesses within his first week. The doctors predicted that he would not live, and if he did, then he would face many health issues later in life. Through his family's prayers, Dani was able to overcome the illnesses. But as he grew up, his doctors predicted that he would be limited in what he could do. They said he wouldn't be able to run, jump, or play any sports. But Dani was able to overcome this "disability" in his life and demonstrates it by playing soccer.

Dani began to play for a local club in Colombia. While he was on this team, Dani traveled to Argentina and many countries in Europe for tournaments. After finishing his senior year (which a boy does at 16 in Colombia), he decided to expand his options for college and transfer to a school in the US to learn English. He did so hoping that he would be able to go to a college in the US and earn a scholarship to play soccer. In the spring of 2011 Dani played in the Dallas Cup with his Colombian team. Then through family connections, he enrolled at Covenant Christian Academy (in Colleyville Texas) for the fall of 2011 and joined a club in Irving named Club Classic. After earning permission from TAPPS, he was able to play for CCA's soccer team. Dani is a leader on the team, always giving a hundred percent. He never complains on the field or in practice. He is a starting forward and leads Covenant in goals scored.

Dani's perseverance and determination have inspired me this year to be the best I can be and adapt to the changes in my life. Though he will only be at Covenant for a year, I will always look to Dani as a teammate, a fellow Christian, an inspiration, and a friend.

CCA

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Message: Coach Sallie Kirkpatrick has been an inspirational blessing to each member of the Covenant Christian Academy Lady Cougars junior high basketball team. CCA is a terrific school where we are surrounded by many adults that model Christian character. Coach Kirkpatrick in particular has shown us what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. In everything she does, her priorities are clear, and they start with her Lord and Savior.

As a seventh grader, I had never before played the game of basketball. Now, as an eighth grader, there is nothing I would rather do. Thanks to Coach Kirkpatrick's influence, I have grown to truly love the game. But coach Kirkpatrick has taught me so much more than to love basketball. As a 14 year old girl, I have seen her endure difficult personal trials. Through these trials, she never lost her faith in God. Through these trials, she always maintained the heart of a Christian servant, finding time to listen, teach and encourage each of us individually. She confronts conflict with the heart of a servant and an honesty that inspires trust in all of her students. Her love for what she does is as obvious as her love of God. Coach "K" is an incredible competitor, but she is an even more incredible witness to His love and faithfulness. Her influence on me will last long after I take my last shot as a CCA Lady Cougar.