

## I Just Want My Dad Back

By: Leah Masi



### “I Just Want My Dad Back”

That’s how Kyra Wood sums up the journey that has shaped much of her life — a journey filled with conflict, a journey she never even asked for.

“I don’t want to grow up too fast,” Wood said.

While still a student at Frederick Law Olmsted at Kensington School #156 in Buffalo, New York, Wood was determined to play modified sports — no matter what. She still wanted to be a kid, to enjoy sports without pressure.

At just 13 years old, Wood stood six feet tall. When she transferred to City Honors, she didn’t yet know how much it would change her life, especially when it came to basketball.

### City Honors.

“He started talking about it [basketball] less leisurely and more seriously,” Wood said. “I refused to join varsity at Olmsted, but once I got to City Honors, I didn’t have a choice anymore.”

By the time she turned 14, basketball had become the main divider between Wood’s relationship with her dad.

At one point, she wanted to quit the sport altogether.

She felt like her father no longer saw her as his daughter, but only as an athlete. Born on the same day, the two had once been inseparable.

But suddenly, their conversations, their bonding time — everything — was consumed by basketball. The word she uses to describe that stage of her life: exhaustion.

“I just want a day where I don’t have to talk about basketball, and my future, and ‘you need to do this better in a game so people can look at you better,’” she said. “I don’t care about this — not as much as he wanted me to.”

All she really wanted was to play volleyball and she wasn’t willing to give it up.

But her father pushed back. Hard.

“If you go the volleyball route, I will not pay for your college,” he told her.

She fought for it anyway. She forced him to allow her to join a travel volleyball team and, in doing so, said goodbye to whatever social life she had left.

But in the process, she found someone who believed in her.

City Honors head volleyball coach Deborah Matos became a lifeline.

“I was going through so many different teams, people, and teammates,” Wood said. “She was the only consistent person who didn’t even hold it against me that I was going through this with my dad.”

Matos even advocated for Wood directly.

“She told my dad, ‘Your daughter loves volleyball, and I’ll excuse her from some things if she needs to focus on basketball, because I know that’s your priority,’” Wood said. “But her priority is with us and this team, so I’m going to honor what she wants to do.”

For Wood, that kind of support meant everything.

“She and my grandma were the only ones who really supported me when it came to volleyball,” she said. “Even if I went back to basketball, she supported me no matter what. It meant a lot, especially because I didn’t get that from my dad.”

Her father, meanwhile, stayed firm. He saw the future basketball could give her. He had sacrificed everything to get her where she was. And eventually, she began to understand.

At the end of ninth grade, she had a real conversation with her dad about college, basketball, and her future.

She realized he'd been right all along.

From then on, nonstop basketball — varsity, AAU tournaments, one-on-one training sessions — all while fully committing to volleyball.

Still, she couldn't help but wonder how much further she might have gone had she stayed at Olmsted. She said suburban schools always got more athletic exposure than city schools like City Honors.

But Wood never lost sight of what was important to her. Achieving her goals despite her situation.

**“Why can't I make it somewhere and be in a city school?”** she said.

She didn't get the same spotlight other schools received, and she was okay with that.

Because eventually, the scouts came to her. She soon paved the way for future athletes and changed the narrative surrounding city school athletics.

### **College.**

Once Wood committed to Temple University, her relationship with her father was still on the mend.

As a freshman Division I athlete, she was learning how to navigate her new life.

“I was going through so much emotionally, and I didn't need any motivation towards basketball anymore,” she said. “I just needed my dad.”

When she transferred to Syracuse University, things finally started to shift. Her father was able to attend more of her games since it was closer to home. He showed up, not just as a coach figure, but as a dad.

“Gradually, we both learned,” Wood said. “He just wanted a relationship with me. But at the end of the day, he loves ‘basketball Kyra’ so I can't take that from him. But on the other side, I just wanted my dad. The one who didn't talk about basketball all the time.”

It took effort — from both sides. But they worked on it.

When Wood got to college, she said, she truly matured. And with that maturity came clarity and the ability to rebuild what had been slipping away.

“I have a strong relationship with both of my parents now,” Wood said.

**All because of a bouncing orange ball.**