

# LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE

MASSACHUSETTS LEVEL II HONORS 2009

Dear Mr. Lupica,

“He knew he was small. He just didn’t think he was small. Big difference.”

I read *Travel Team* when I was in sixth grade, and at that time this was just another novel that I had to read for free choice reading in school. Now in eighth grade this book has sent a deeper message to me that I never realized. Danny, an undersized boy, got cut from his town’s travel team as I also did recently. I could feel his delight and excitement when his dad offered to make a team and coach the kids who got cut and turn them into champions. I could only wish that something like that would happen in my town. This book told me to never give up and that size does not matter. What matters is the person inside the body, not the outside. It also told me if you stick with one thing for a while, good things are bound to come your way.

Ever since I started grade school, it has been the same old thing. At school and in sports, I am repeatedly asked “Are you the right age group?” and told “Malin, your seat is right up front.” These are constant in my life and it is similar to what happened to Danny. I play sports whenever I can, and when I do play, I give 110% day in and day out. I always use my height (or lack thereof) to my advantage. When they first meet me on the playing surface, taller competitors often make the mistake of thinking my height is a disadvantage to me. But as they soon find out, it is not. Being small means you can do everything just as well as taller people, maybe even better.

A few weeks ago, for the first time in my life, my height was a disadvantage for me. I tried out for the travel basketball team. I played on this team last year and was one of the top scorers so I thought it was a slam dunk. Even so, I gave my best and I thought I had the best tryout of my life just like Danny did. I woke up the next morning expecting to receive the e-mail saying I made the team. Boy was I surprised to find out I didn’t make it. But when I got to school I knew why. Every boy on the team had half a foot on me, at least. You can’t coach height.

Throughout my entire life, I have been through experiences similar to Danny when it comes to sports. At tryouts, potential coaches often second guess my age. But when they see me play with the group, they know I belong. Danny had the same issue and proved the dads with the clipboards wrong. Within Danny, I truly saw myself. Danny has a huge heart, exceptional work ethic, great hustle, and the greatest characteristic of all: he will never let his height bother him in any which way.

I have read many of your books and enjoyed them all, but *Travel Team* really hit home. Any kid who is discouraged about his height getting in the way of sports should read this book and then try to figure out a way to use their short stature to their advantage. That’s exactly what I intend to do next week at my school’s basketball tryouts. Hopefully, the coach will see my infinite work ethic and not my infinitesimal height.

Sincerely,

*Malin*

Malin Segal  
Marblehead Veterans Middle School  
Grade 8