



Student Spotlight: The Tyler Morrill Story

Ryan Martin, Editor

You're in the championship. With the gold medal on the line, the score is tied. As the clock winds down the few seconds it has left, your teammate zips a pass in your direction. You nail the shot as the buzzer sounds, sending everyone into a frenzy: You are a champion.

The narrative has been dreamed of and practiced by countless kids on turf fields, ice rinks, and courts around the world. For Franklin's Tyler Morrill, the moment came to fruition last June as he was a part of the Franklin Unified Basketball Team. Morrill's buzzer-beater in the Special Olympics final crowned Franklin the Gold medalists.

"I was so confident I was going to make that shot!" Morrill said, grinning.

That confidence from Morrill helped him in the gold medal game, but has also led him to so much more as a high school student. In his third year at Franklin, Morrill can now be seen walking the halls in between classes and attending sporting events with the school's biggest smile, dishing out high-fives left and right to his friends. The energy and passion Morrill exudes are infectious to see, but that confidence and joy weren't always there before he became a Panther.



Franklin Unified Basketball's Tyler Morrill celebrates winning the Gold Medal last June by jumping into his stepdad's arms. (Erin Gately)

Coming to Franklin

Prior to moving to Franklin, Morrill and his family lived in the Dorchester area where he attended an integration school. Living there until the family's pandemic move in 2020, Morrill was subject to bullying and harassment from his middle school peers.

"It was supposed to be the best in Massachusetts for integration," Morrill's mom, Erin Gately, said of the school, "but [Tyler] would come home almost every day with different stories... of being bullied."

Knowing a change was needed, the family enrolled Morrill at Franklin High School. Morrill's stepdad, Jared Gately, graduated from Franklin High in 2005 and knew the town would be more accepting of his son.

"I got nervous at first", Morrill admitted of the new school, "... but then it was just excitement"



Morrill with mom, dad, and sister in Orlando, Florida during the 2022 Special Olympics (Erin Gately)

That excitement was shared by Morrill's family and new home: Tyler quickly acclimated himself to Franklin High, while his energy and passion rubbed off on peers and faculty.

"I never thought it would turn out the way it did," Gately said, "It really changed not just Tyler's life, but mine, my husband's, my daughters'. Everybody welcomed him with open arms."

While meeting new friends in the classroom, Morrill also formed new connections through the extracurriculars he took part in... including Franklin's Unified Basketball Team.

Winning Gold

After becoming the first team from Massachusetts to qualify for the Special Olympics, Morrill and the Panthers' Unified Basketball Team worked their way up to the gold medal game against Team Oregon this past June. In Orlando, Florida, Franklin found themselves down two points with less than a minute left to play.

Morrill, who was dubbed the team's "Michael Jordan" before the competition, scored the final four points for Franklin to win the gold medal. Morrill's mom, dad, and 20 other family members were in

attendance to see it all play out.

"It was like a movie watching it happen," Gately recalled.

After receiving their well-earned medals, the team returned home to a hero's welcome: Morrill and teammates had a police escort back to the school, where hundreds of supporters and members of the Franklin community threw a parade to celebrate their accomplishments.

"Everyone was hugging me and so happy for me when I got off the bus... it makes me feel happy and [emotional] sometimes," Morrill said.

"I knew that Franklin was very supportive in general, but they really blew it out of the water to see all the support and love... It made our hearts so full." his mom added.



Morrill (middle) hugs his teammates in jubilation after winning Special Olympics Gold Medal in 2022 (Erin Gately)

Fast forward seven months, and Morrill is still making waves on the basketball court. After being back in action with the Franklin Unified team this past fall, Morrill now finds himself in his latest role: Manager of the Franklin girls' varsity team.

A New Title

After coaching Morrill as part of his work with Franklin's unified team, Franklin Girls' varsity basketball coach John Leighton wanted Morrill's energy on the bench for his Panthers team this season.

"[Tyler] had also developed a good friendship with several members of the team," Leighton said, "I thought inviting Tyler to be our manager was a natural fit."

For Morrill, the proposal was easy to accept

"I wanted to manage the team because I want to help other people." Morrill said proudly.

As team manager, Morrill is routinely at practice, bringing his love and excitement for basketball while competing with the girls in different drills.

Much like his presence in school, Morrill's passion for helping the team has become a driving force for players this season.

"I have spent a lot of time with Tyler at Unified Basketball over his past two years in Franklin; It's easy to observe his undeniable passion for basketball," Franklin senior captain Katie Peterson explained, "... The whole team is motivated every day by Tyler's positive energy."

Franklin (4-2) will look to continue using that energy as they host Sharon and North Attleboro this coming week. As for Morrill, he thinks this team has sights set way bigger than finishing out the regular season.

"They can make it to the state championship this year, I know they can!" he said.