

New Mexico Activities Association Student-Athlete Spotlight



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Denetso's Fight came at an Early Age

By Tyler Dunkel, NMAA Sports Information Director

Brianna Denetso, a junior at Tohatchi High School, was born with a congenital heart defect - a hole in the heart - which was caught by doctors when she was six months old. Since an early age, however, Denetso has never let her condition define who she was or stop her from doing what she loves.

"From the time I was little I had to fight and work hard for what I've accomplished because of my heart condition. I wanted to prove to everyone that I wasn't going to let it slow me down and take control of my life. That is why I want to be a pediatrician, so I can help others who are born with a hole in their heart. My main goal is to come back to the area and give back to this community and serve as a doctor."

Denetso has been involved in basketball and volleyball, playing varsity since her freshman year and she enjoys the competitiveness and relationships she has built.

"I've played volleyball and basketball for Tohatchi since my freshman year. I have enjoyed every moment so far and I look forward to each and every year. I have made some really good friends playing sports and playing sports has taught me to be a better person on and off the court."

Last year, she helped the Lady Cougars to the state volleyball tournament, an accomplishment that meant a lot not only to her but the program and the school.

"We worked really hard to achieve our goal of making it to state last year. I think it helped us realize that hard work really does pay off in the end, which has motivated us, even more, this year to make it further in the tournament this year.

That same year, Denetso played point guard for Tohatchi and guided them to a Final Four appearance at the state basketball tournament, falling to Tularosa. However, Denetso explained that making the Final Four put Tohatchi girls' basketball on the map in the state of New Mexico.

"Last year we made the final four of state and lost to Tularosa. It was a great experience not only to make it to the final four but to show the state of New Mexico that Tohatchi is a team you have to worry about come state tournament time."

She also mentioned the importance of the game of basketball in the Tohatchi community and how some see it as a way out.

"Basketball is really important to this community. Everyone plays. I think a lot of times, especially with the Native American culture, people see basketball as a way out of their communities and something that can take them to bigger and better things in life. I really don't see myself playing basketball in



college but I have heard from others that if I continue to work hard I might get a scholarship offer. I really just want to further my education somewhere.”

In addition to sports, Denetso is also involved in National Honor Society, is the junior student council representative for her school and is a member of the Native Club, all while maintaining a 3.8 GPA. She explained that time management is key.

“My main supporters are my parents. They are always on me to do my best no matter what I’m involved in. My mom is the driving force behind my school work and my dad pushes me in basketball and volleyball. It is a good balance to have and they both help me stay on track. I try to have good time management.”

She continued by saying, “I put twice as much effort into my school work as I do my sports because I know that my education will take me further than basketball or volleyball will in the long run. I plan to go to a community college after graduation and then finish up my schooling at a four-year university.”

Regardless of the situation or condition, Denetso has never stopped fighting for what she desired and, from the looks of it; she doesn’t seem to be slowing down anytime soon.