

No Boundaries

Freshman Casey Ratzlaff dominates the tennis court while living with Spina Bifida

By Justin Noble

He goes down the hall with crutches or a wheelchair because he can't use his legs. He never has been able to use them. But freshman Casey Ratzlaff has accomplished a lot.

Ratzlaff was born with Spina Bifida, meaning his spinal column didn't close when he was in the womb.

This hasn't stopped him from becoming an exceptional athlete.

Ratzlaff recently went to Turkey and played on the U.S. junior tennis team that attended the World Team Cup, where the best wheelchair tennis players compete. Though Ratzlaff played only one doubles match in Turkey, he and his teammate swept their opponents in two sets 6-0, 6-1.

Although Ratzlaff has only been playing tennis for two years, he won the U.S. Open in his division, making him the No. 2 junior tennis player in the U.S.

"It was a really big tournament. A lot more people than there usually is at tournaments," Ratzlaff said. "All of the best players in the world were there too."

Ratzlaff will be going out for the tennis team this spring. Since Ratzlaff plays in a wheelchair he will play by modi-

fied rules. For instance, he will get two bounces instead of just one. Also the wheelchair is considered a part of the body, so all rules that apply to the body will apply to the wheelchair.

Ratzlaff has learned to live with Spina Bifida and doesn't focus on the negative side of things.

"I don't overcome it," Ratzlaff said. "There's no way of fixing it. Forget about the cons and focus on the pros."

Ratzlaff never wants to make excuses for having his disability.

"He wants us to treat him like everybody else," Tammy Ratzlaff, Casey's mom, said. "He just wants to be looked at as a normal kid. He just happens to use crutches."

Though he has beaten the odds and has done a lot in his two years of playing tennis, he doesn't believe that it's anything big to be talking about.

"I'm just a kid who worked hard at his game," he said.

Physical Education teacher Mike Darrah, who has known Ratzlaff all of his life, thinks that he has always done his best with a positive attitude. He hopes that Ratzlaff will continue to be great in the future, even though he has no prediction about what will happen.

"God knows his plan," Darrah said. ■



Béle Benard



Photo Submitted By Tammy Ratzlaff



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Top: Freshman Casey Ratzlaff poses with his two medals from the U.S. open and his trophy from an Atlanta Open win.

Middle: Ratzlaff, left, and his teammate shake hands after winning their match in straight sets 6-0, 6-1.

Left: Ratzlaff (far right, first row) with the rest of the U.S. team at the World Team Cup in Turkey.