



The NVHS Athletic Booster Club is proud to present the second featured athlete of this week, Special Olympics Athlete **Liam Meza**. When we met with Christina Pawola, she mentioned her best buddy Liam Meza and invited him to be part of her portrait. It just happens that Liam Meza was the athlete nominated by his coach Ms. Weichle, to represent the Special Olympics Program. Liam is an outspoken leader, a charming gentleman, and if you are not careful, he will steal your heart before you can do anything about it!

Booster Club Reporter: *Liam, Tina told me you are a pretty well rounded athlete. What sports do you play?*

Liam: I play Unified Soccer, Basketball, Swimming, Track and Bowling all for Special Olympics.

Booster Club Reporter: *What made you decide to compete?*

Liam: I wanted to compete in Special Olympics because it gives me the chance to play sports with my friends on a team and win medals.

Booster Club Reporter: *What do you find most fun, and what do you find harder, in participating in the Special Olympics?*

Liam: I love to help my team. I am a good leader and can help my friends. Last year I played on Varsity 1 team. That was hard. I didn't get to play as much because I was still working on my skills and the game was much faster than when I played on Varsity 2.

Booster Club Reporter: *That must have been tough. What is your strategy to deal with "tough learning moments"? Can you give me an example of something you've learned from a difficult situation?*

Liam: I had a tough learning moment last year. I was very busy participating in Project Unify and was the Co-chair for the Youth Activation Committee for Illinois. We got chosen to participate in Lobby Day in Washington D.C. Because of this, I didn't get to swim in the Special Olympics swim meet at Neuqua. I did get to swim in another Area swim meet and tried to qualify for state but did not make the cut. I learned that sometimes you have to make sacrifices in some areas of your life to attend to another interest. I also learned that I am still a great athlete even if I don't win a gold medal and make it to the state competition.

Booster Club Reporter: *That is so true! I see that you've learned a great deal about managing your choices. What else has the Special Olympics brought into your life?*

Liam: My three coaches teach me so much, like being a team player, to help my friends, and to act like an athlete and be a good sport. They are always proud of us. The Special Olympics program has also taught me to be a leader. In Project Unify I had to lead sessions at conferences with my partner, so I learned to be confident, professional and organized.

Booster Club Reporter: *This is a great skill for adult life, and since this is your last year of High School, where do you go from here? What are you going to miss most about High School?*

Liam: I will go to the S.T.E.P.P.S. transition program next year. I will miss my friends who will go away to college, my teachers and my coaches. I will also miss all of the fun activities like Best Buddies and dances and football games.

Booster Club Reporter: *Do you have a role model?*

Liam: Yes. My role model is my best friend, Tina Pawola. She's the best friend one could have. She always helps me, makes me happy, and we hang out together. She's smart and nice to everyone.

Booster Club Reporter: *Tell me three things that most people don't know about you.*

Liam: First, my peer partners, teachers and coaches might not know how much I really appreciate all they do to help me and my special needs friends. Second, I really like to be a leader. And third, I really like to travel with my family and see new things.

Booster Club Reporter: *Thank you Liam. Do you have any final words for all your readers out there?*

Liam: If I could say something to impact other kids it would be to never judge someone by what you see on the outside. Get to know them and give them a chance. They are probably like you and want the same things in life like having friends, having fun, and just to be accepted for who they are. Also I would tell them to never give up on anything.