



Digs – Fall 2016

An adventure on the Boys' Youth National Team for Jaylen Jasper

Ever wonder what it was like to be on the U.S. Boys' Youth National Team? We had a chance to talk to Jaylen Jasper of the Annapolis Volleyball Club who had the honor of being on the 2016 U.S. Boys' Youth National Team this year.

Jaylen, a senior at Broadneck High School in Maryland, was invited to go to Fullerton, California along with 23 other boys for additional training and final cuts for the Youth team. Most people think that you make the team after your initial tryout for HP, but that is just the first cut for the national team. After three grueling days of training, each of the 24 boys in attendance were individually called in to meet face to face to find out if they were on the team or not. Out of 24, 12 boys were chosen for the team plus four alternates. He knew many of the boys he played with from previous competitions across the U.S. and camps. It was exciting but very stressful, much like today's reality shows. Jaylen was the third or fourth to the last to meet with the coaches. As he waited, he thought about how lucky he was to practice with these other guys who he enjoyed playing with and were so good at volleyball, but also how much he hoped he had made the team. When he heard, "We want to offer you a spot on the team," he almost broke down he was so happy. Of course, he thanked them and was then excited to begin the 10 days of additional training prior to going to the team's competition.



The NORCECA Boys' U19 Continental Championship was in Cuba this year. Although most of his teammates had travelled outside the U.S. before, this was a new adventure for Jaylen as it was his first time outside of the U.S. The food, the culture and the travel were all thrilling and memorable. Jaylen felt the Cuban people were really nice, cheering for the teams and asking for pictures after matches. But when the U.S. met Cuba in the finals, the cheering was heavily in favor of the Cuban team. They clearly had home court advantage. Just a match earlier after winning their pool and having a bye into the semifinals, the U.S. had defeated Mexico in a thrilling five set match with the U.S. winning set five of the semifinal with a score of 15-13.



Now in the finals against Cuba, the Boys were not only competing against a determined Cuban team but also against a loud Cuban crowd. Gone were the cheers for the U.S. and all that could be heard were cheers, in fact roars, for Cuba. After eight days of competition, the U.S. team, with Jaylen as a starter, fought hard in the finals. Sadly the U.S. team came up short by just a few points, forcing the match to 5 sets and losing in the fifth 11-15. But on a positive note, by taking the Silver medal, the 2016 U.S. Boys Youth National Team automatically qualified the USA for the 2017 FIVB Boys U19 World Championship.



Will Jaylen be a part of that team in 2017? He can't be sure. Next year's US Boys Youth National Team chosen through the 2017 USAV HP program will compete at Worlds. As he enters the HP tryouts in 2017 just like everyone else, Jaylen will be focused on working hard before, during and after the tryouts to help him make the team again next year. He had a great competition this year as Opposite for the U.S. with 15 kills in the final, averaging three kills per set. He hopes to be given a chance to do even more for Team USA again next year.

Through the stress, laughter and great volleyball, Jaylen's advice is like other great players' advice. He said simply, "Go for it. This was an awesome experience that everyone should dream of having."