

2020 NJTL Essay Contest – Kaleb Ngwendson

How I strive for success in terms of Tennis.

I had my first tennis lesson when I was five, at a USTA Summer Camp. At the time, we also lived in an apartment complex with a rugged tennis court, where I remember spending hours hitting the ball with my mom. Nobody in my family is a tennis player, but my family enjoyed watching tennis. My love for tennis grew more and more as I watched top players like Roger Federer, and Kei Nishikori hit clean shots, and track down tough shots, that inspired me to want to be like them. When I was 6, we moved to Roseau, a small town in Northwestern Minnesota. My mother tried to get me into tennis, but there was only tennis for girls, while most of the boys played hockey. My mom spoke with the High School Tennis Coach, and he allowed me to hit with the girls' tennis team a few times. My parents would often take me to the tennis courts after school, and we would hit for hours. I was determined to be the best, though I did not have any exposure, nor the opportunities that would help me grow in tennis. I made good with what I had, I took whatever opportunity I could, and made the most of it. At the age of 8, we moved to southern Minnesota, where there was a lot more tennis and exposure. My parents signed me up to take lessons at a tennis center called Fred Wells. Fred Wells Tennis and Education Center provided me with many opportunities I had never had in my entire life. They took me to Team USA, which held in Rochester, Minnesota. The National USTA coach knew I needed improvement, and he said words that I will never forget: "Kaleb is not ready to play high-level tournaments". When he said those words, that changed my training mindset. I gave my full 100% in matches, and in practice. I fought harder and harder because I desired to become the best of the best. Winning my first high-level tournament gave me a sensation that I had never really felt before. It made me want to keep playing and to practice harder. This attitude and mindset is what keeps pushing me to become better until today, and I never miss practice unless I'm sick, or I don't have a ride. There was even a time where I looked into public transportation systems to get to practice. Though my mom wouldn't let me ride at my age. (She was concerned for my safety as a young black male) Working with my current coach has transformed my game significantly, and he's made me a better player, and a better person. I know I still have a long way to go, and a lot to learn, but I feel like working with my coach makes my dream of becoming the best of the best seem more like a reality than a dream.