



Special student is an inspiring athlete at Toms River North

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Michael Roberts was in the midst of a career game for the Toms River North bowling team during a recent match against Brick at Ocean Lanes in Lakewood.

He went into the 10th frame with an 183 score, with a first-ever 200-game within reach. As it turned out, he wound up one pin shy of a spare, leaving him with a 192 that still represented the best effort of the senior's career.

The first thing he did was smile. The second was to encourage a teammate who was also in the midst of his final frame.

As far as not reaching 200, he also had a well-thought reaction.

"That's okay," he said. "I still have time to get it."

The effort, the reaction and the optimism perfectly sum up Roberts, who could very well be the most popular and well-liked person in his entire school.

There's another thing about Roberts, who is a captain for his team and an Eagle Scout among many impressive accomplishments.

Michael has autism. He also provides daily inspiration to all who cross paths with him at the Ocean County school, whether it be in the hallways, classrooms, as a spectator at many TRN sporting events, or as a leader and teammate on the bowling team.



Michael Roberts celebrates during the final seconds of Toms River North's victory over Passaic County Tech in the state Group 5 football final.



Michael was honored by the Toms River Board of Education after earning Eagle Scout recognition.

Just ask Micah Ford, the All-State quarterback/defensive back and leader of Toms River North's NJSIAA Group 5 state championship-winning football team, who is also a honor student and headed to Stanford University.

Some students, particularly younger ones, may look up to Ford. But when Micah seeks inspiration, he thinks about Roberts.

"He's so inspirational," Ford said. "He's the light of our school. When you see him walking around, all you can do is smile. It's the highlight of your day. He's at every game, no matter how far, no matter if it's rain, hail, sleet or snow. It's good to have a supporter like that. He's a really special person."

Those points are echoed by administrators at the school.

“During his time at High School North, Michael has always been extremely enthusiastic regarding our school,” said TRN principal Ed Keller. “He is a mainstay at most of our events that occur here, but especially our sporting events. He loves football and basketball. Michael attends every home game and is often at away games. Michael is well known to our student athletes and I believe that they embrace him because he is an open book. He hides nothing and you can see right into his heart. Michael bleeds Blue and Gold and is an excellent example of the Mariner Spirit we hope to instill in our students.”



Michael with his Toms River North bowling teammates in a pre-match huddle.

“Michael is one of the greatest assets to our athletic programs,” added Keith Stryker, the athletic coordinator at Toms River North. “I can not express enough what Michael brings to each game he attends and how students respond to what he does for our athletic programs. Since my tenure at Toms River North, I have grown to know Michael as an integral part of home and away events, as he attends each on a regular basis. There is not a single individual here that would deny what he means to our school and community. When Michael is in attendance at our events, he brings the level of spirit and confidence beyond comparison to any other.”



Michael reacts to rolling a strike in a recent match.

Ask Michael, and his reason for being so committed to his school is a simple one.

“I love my school, and I love being a people person,” he said.

His support goes way beyond being a supporter at events. A prime example is his commitment to the Boy Scouts. Approximately five percent of scouts become Eagle Scouts. Michael earned the honor after an arduous process which included earning nearly two dozen merit badges and completing a service project that involved designing, building and placing five bird houses and a bat house around the Toms River North campus.

He’s been in Toms River schools since Kindergarten, and the district and its people have supported him ever since.

As a fan of so many teams at the high school, he’s overjoyed to be one who participates on the bowling team, and to have his support reciprocated.

His bowling career began in 2016 when he went with a friend to a Special Olympics bowling league in Brick.

Terry Ann Sullivan is the bowling coach at Toms River North, and is overjoyed to have Michael on the team, both as a performer and leader.



Michael follows through while rolling a career-best 192 game in a recent match.

“Michael is exuberant and a total team player,” she said. “He takes his job as a mentor and captain so seriously, and he wants to make sure he is welcoming of the freshmen and sophomores. I couldn’t be more proud of somebody who puts the team in front of himself like that. He’s fun, and he’s delightful. He’s a special kid.”

“He’s very much community minded,” Sullivan said. “He will always make sure he’s connected. He was so proud of his Eagle Scout project. He got so many of the people in the community involved with it. And it’s never about him. It’s always about the greater good. He’s a kid who will always hold the door, and will talk to a teammate to rally them on.”

As for Michael, he wouldn’t have it any other way.

“I love being around people,” he said. “And being a part of a sport is a good thing, because you can learn stuff by practicing, and accepting challenges.”