

Bolles Student-athlete Launches Nonprofit

Thoughtful program ensures foster kids 'get in the game'

Jai Patel, a sophomore basketball athlete and community service entrepreneur at The Bolles School, recalls the genesis of his nonprofit organization, Foster Athletic Network, Inc. (FAN), with passion.

"While I was playing on my AAU basketball team, I noticed there were always kids there with my coach who were never invited to play with the team – I wondered why and asked my coach about it," Jai said. He learned the coach and his family were providing foster care for these young people and due to limited funding for extracurricular activities, they were not able to participate in athletic leagues. This revelation was sad and eye-opening for Patel, who knew how transformational sports had been to his own personal growth and sense of community. "They were missing out on invaluable experiences, and I wanted to change that – I was compelled to take action."

Soon thereafter, Jai founded FAN to help empower kids in the local foster care system to "chase their dreams and enjoy the benefits of being on a team – just like I have the opportunity," he said.

The organization is dedicated to an important mission: to provide local foster children with more opportunities for physical activity, mentorship and personal development. The nonprofit organization aims to create a nurturing and inclusive environment for athletics where every child – regardless of their background – can discover their potential and develop essential life skills.

Jai, who lives with his parents and brother in Jacksonville's San Marco neighborhood, said his organization will help meet a tremendous demand in Jacksonville and surrounding counties. Recent statistics show nearly 22,500 children were in Florida foster care programs, including nearly 1,000 in Duval County.

"There are so many kids who love sports but don't have access to the necessary resources," Jai said. "Foster Athletic Network is dedicated to providing mentorship, equipment and opportunities to these young athletes to ensure financial constraints and lack of support don't hinder their potential."

Jai expects to host his first fundraising and awareness event this May during National Foster Week.

"I want to grow Foster Athletic Network into a well-established organization that supports young athletes at every level and over time, I hope to collaborate with schools, businesses, and professional athletes to expand its impact," said Jai, who is looking to build strategic partnerships that will inspire community engagement and more robust sports programs for foster children. "Too many foster kids face barriers that prevent them from joining a team, attending camp, or simply playing the game. Through the Foster Athletic Network, we will raise funds to ensure these kids have the opportunities they deserve – opportunities to build confidence, form lasting friendships and

discover their inner strength."

Jai wants to change the narrative of seeing foster children at sports practice. Instead of being sidelined, he hopes FAN will get them out on the court, field, pool or course where they belong. Raising awareness and funds to pay for it all is his winning strategy. He is building mission and momentum for a winning season this spring.

Jai is asking supporters to donate funds to the organization, volunteer to be a coach, mentor or event organizer, become a business or community partner via sponsorships and facility use and to simply spread the word about how Foster Athletic Network can change young lives in Jacksonville.

For Jai, it's personal.

And, with FAN's new 501(c) (3) federal tax-exempt status, donors can deduct their contributions after the IRS validated the charity Feb. 19, 2025.

"I want to create something that allows me to combine my passion for sports and entrepreneurship," said Jai, who plans to pursue an education and career in business and continue his passion for sports. "My goal is to build something that not only supports me but also creates opportunities for others, especially young athletes who need guidance and resources to succeed."

For more information on the Foster Athletic Network, Inc. (FAN), visit fosterathleticnetwork.com.



Jai Patel