

Aaron Liberman: Finding balance between faith, basketball

By Ashley Zeldin, Contributing Writer | PUBLISHED Mar 2, 2011 | Community

“There is God in everything. Even basketball.”

When Aaron Liberman said that, endless legs splayed out in front of him on a Sunday morning in late December, he didn't know how true his words would be.

Just days later, the Valley Torah senior center was sent sprawling four times in a basketball game against league opponent New Community Jewish High School on Jan. 8. He sustained a punctured lung.

There was God in his rapid recovery.

Three weeks later, Liberman, a lanky 6-foot-9, returned to lead the Wolfpack, reeling from consecutive losses, to recapture the Westside League title and clinch the top seed in the California Interscholastic Federation Division 6AA basketball championship tournament.

Now Liberman and 22-4 Valley Torah, the No. 2 team in the national Jewish basketball team rankings, are playing for the title.

Averaging 18 points, 11.3 rebounds and 8.8 blocks per game — and a 3.4 grade point average across his Judaic and secular studies — Liberman has earned interest from Ivy League and basketball schools alike, including Yale and Dartmouth, Boston College and Pepperdine.

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K4n63pUCzQo>

However, many collegiate basketball games would conflict with Liberman's Shabbat observance.

"My religion is important to me, and so is basketball," he said.

"He'll have a decision to make," said Lenard Liberman, Aaron's father. "A lot happens between now and when he'll start college. I think it's about getting into the right program with the right coach."

Lenard Liberman, a Stanford alumnus, would like his son to consider the Cardinal.

"They said, 'Gain 50 pounds and we'll talk to you,' " Lenard Liberman said of his own attempt to walk on to Stanford's basketball team some two decades ago. "So Aaron's living my dream in a lot of ways. He's much better than I was as a basketball player, and he's a great student. He can do great things with that."