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In the Spotlight: Dancing a Dream

Local Student a Member of Cavs’ Scream Team

By Danielle Young

Though the Cleveland Cavaliers were unable to dance their way to a championship victory, one local student was able to dance his way onto the NBA’s best hip hop team.

Malcolm Battiato, 19, who graduated from Chardon High School in May, has been a member of the official Cavs Scream Team, an elite dance group, for all of his senior year.

Footwork Foundations

A Chardon resident, Battiato has been dancing for about five years, specializing in break dancing or bboying.

He was inspired by Michael Jackson, “one of the best dancers ever,” and James Brown for his free spirit and the fire he brought to the stage. He admired both for what they conquered and how they broke barriers.

He got involved with Jasmine Dragons, the dance and yoga studio on Chardon Square, about four years ago.

Jasmine Dragons owner Matt Martsof said when he first met Battiato, he had one little dance move, but he has grown both physically and mentally in his dance over the years.

Jasmine Dragons, founded in 2009 by Martsof and his son, focuses on providing a non-competitive space for dancers, which allows for a very sharing atmosphere.

Martsof emphasizes foundations, on any level, to avoid injury, with manual warm-ups and stretches. He said it’s not about “just doing it.” There is a lot of work behind the scenes.

“Don’t talk about it, be about it,” Martsof said. “If people like it, people like it.”

Martsof said he tries to crack some of the break dancing stereotypes.

The Scream Team

The Cavs energetic Scream Team, which just celebrated its 10th anniversary, holds annual auditions to take only the best of the best. The age range of the members is typically 20s to mid-30s. The minimum age is 18, so Battiato had to wait a few years for his dream.

Battiato said he has always been a fan of the NBA and wanted to be a part of it somehow.

He was finally able to audition last year with 121 other dancers. He was one of only four new members to be picked, along with returning members.

Battiato said it was unbelievable, as he didn’t think he would get it.

“I kind of never thought I would get there,” he said.

Martsof said he wasn’t surprised at all and that many people were rooting for him. He said Battiato kept his cool and wasn’t intimidated.

In the Spotlight

Battiato began practicing with the Scream Team in August 2014. He said he was kind of shy at first, but the other members helped him through it.

Battiato’s nickname and stage name is “Spark” because he is always the first person to start dancing.

He learned many different styles and moves from the Scream Team and it was the first time he had dealt with choreography. He also saw how the Scream Team members told stories through dance.

“Being with 17 of the best dancers in Cleveland, with all different styles, made me more versatile,” he said, adding he is a more well-rounded dancer now.

He learned professional skills, people skills (especially through fan interaction), as well as time-management through balancing school and the Scream Team.

“It was tough at times, but I did it,” Battiato said.

Martsof said the Scream Team is a lot more work in reality than people think.

The group performs at home games and promotional events, as well as schools and community service events.

“We want to share the art of hip hop (with) the kids,” Battiato said.

On the flip side, the Scream Team afforded Battiato the opportunity to meet many NBA players and make a lot of connections.

“The players appreciate us, applaud us,” he said.

He has also met many basketball legends, such as Shaquille O’Neal, Isaiah Thomas and Charles Barkley. As a Scream Team member, “you

have to be professional, you can’t be a fan,” he said.

Battiato said the overall season was very “cool,” and that everyone was excited Lebron James was back.

During the NBA finals, “the whole city was energized, 10 times the normal excitement,” he said, adding had they won, he would have gotten a championship ring.

A Form of Expression

Whether performing for thousands of Cavs fans or spreading the love of dance, Battiato finds one of the best parts of dancing is the ability to express yourself. You can show any emotion and tell stories, he said.

This past school year, Battiato befriended Jacob Lorenzen, 19, an upcoming senior at Chardon High School with Downs syndrome.

One day, Battiato was waiting to leave for Auburn Career Center when Lorenzen started dancing. Later, when someone told Lorenzen who Battiato was and how he was a member of the Scream Team, his face lit up. Battiato heard about the interaction and taught him some dance moves.

“He’s got the groove,” Battiato said.

Lorenzen said he loves spinning, faster-paced dancing and listening to music.

His mother, Ann George, said he loves being active and that dancing is an outlet and a place to express himself.

Battiato emphasized that, with dance or any art form, you shouldn’t feel like you have to impress anyone. Aim to express, not impress, he said.

Battiato tries to make his style his own and to be original by adding some flavor.

He is working throughout the summer and continuing to practice and help out at Jasmine Dragons. He is moving to Pittsburgh in the fall to support his girlfriend at college and plans on working and possibly going to college to major in business management.

He hopes to possibly come back to Cleveland and the Scream Team in a few years. Battiato plans to continue dancing in some way and wants to teach the art form to “keep the hip hop culture alive.”

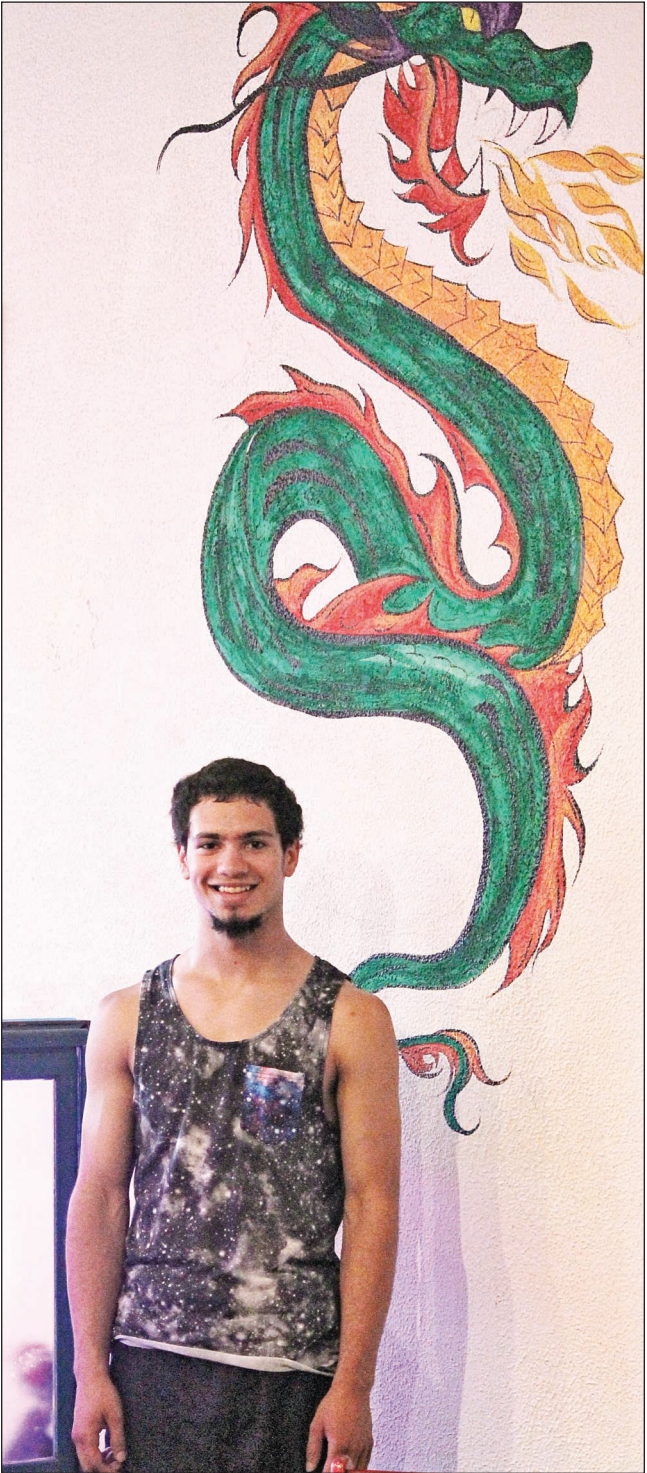
He advised aspiring artists to not do it just to “make it big,” but to use it to express yourself. Make your own style to stand out and be seen as an individual.

Battiato said the most important thing is to stay true to yourself and never give up.

“If you say ‘I can’t,’ then you won’t,” he said.



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DANIELLE YOUNG/KMG

Malcolm Battiato’s nickname, and Scream Team stage name, is “Spark” because he is always the first one to start dancing.