



RON ANTONELLI

Bruce and Elyse Apar address gathering at memorial service for their son Harrison last night at Yorktown High School, where he was an athlete, sports writer and leader.

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Harrison Apar would've liked being in the paper this morning. He would've changed the circumstances, of course, but even so, would not have complained about it.

There was never a complaint from Harrison Apar, who died at age 15 Friday night in Philadelphia Children's Hospital. He was 37 inches tall and 37 pounds, an avid sportsman and aspiring sports writer, a dwarf who, by every account, packed an oversized spirit into an undersized body.

Apar, of Yorktown Heights in northern Westchester, was a straight-A student and one of the most popular students at Yorktown High School, and the proof was there to see last night, when the flag was at half-staff, the band played soulful music and some 500 students, family and friends turned out for a memorial service in his honor.

"He's probably the most secure person I've ever met," said Billy Gaffney, 16, a sophomore who was co-sports editor with Apar of the school paper, *The Voice*, and his best friend. "He just loved challenges. Even though he was 3-foot-1, his attitude and personality could light up a room."

Minutes earlier, Gaffney had walked up to a microphone and said, "I've never had a friend quite like him, and I probably never will."

From the first moment of the service to the end, the evening was about how everyone in the room could learn a lot from how Harrison Apar lived: diving in, going for it, embracing each day, beneath a tattered Super Bowl visor.

"Harrison was treated like anyone else — as if he were 5-feet or 6-feet tall," said Bruce Apar, Harrison's father, his wife Elyse, snugly next to him, daughter Elissa, not far away. Bruce Apar paused. His voice trembled. "There's no way we can express our gratitude for what you've done. We get our strength from all of you being here tonight."

Principal Dr. Dan Brenner invoked the sports cliché about how the best athletes make everyone around them better, and said that's how it was with Harrison in school. Student after student, teacher after teacher, backed him up.

Apar played basketball, though he came up to opponent's thighs. He umpired and officiat-

BIG MAN

Gathering of mates, family salutes life of a good sport



TEAM PLAYER Harrison Apar has a ball on hoop team and also worked games as a referee.

ed youth baseball and basketball, though he was smaller than the participants. He loved Ichiro, Joe Girardi, Tiger Woods and Syracuse basketball, and rarely seemed happier than when his father, a corporate communications consultant, would come home with another fistful of tickets — to Yankee Stadium, the Olympics, the Super Bowl.

Once Harrison was introduced to ESPN Radio's Tony Kornheiser through a family friend. When

Kornheiser offhandedly said during a slow moment on his show that they needed a midget on a skateboard to deliver coffee, Harrison Apar E-mailed him.

"If you are looking for a midget on a skateboard, I'm your man."

A video clip showed Harrison posing with Shaquille O'Neal and Hakeem Olajuwon in a hotel lobby during the 1996 Olympics. Another showed him preening around a stage in drag, belting out Aretha Franklin's "Respect,"

others catching him cavorting with Hall of Famers Phil Rizzuto and Frank Robinson during an autograph signing.

"What took you so long?" Robinson said to Harrison, with a warm laugh.

Doug Press used to coach Apar on a Yorktown Athletic Club basketball team.

"He played for four years knowing he'd never see the ball go through the hoop," Press said. "He couldn't even hit the net, but

it never stopped him. He's a small person who had the courage of 10 people."

Said Bruce Apar, "He just wanted to be out there, one of the guys."

Harrison Apar had lifelong heart and lung problems, and he couldn't play much in recent years. He had two open-heart surgeries, and a third was set for last Thursday, his father's birthday. Apar loved to write, and hours before the surgery, he borrowed his father's laptop and began, "It is the night before my third open-heart surgery, and for reasons unbeknownst to my peers, I am not nervous."

Near the end he said his hope was "to give my dad a refreshing birthday gift wrapped in flesh — a son's healthy heart."

The surgery seemed to go fine, but the next day complications set in. Harrison wasn't getting enough oxygen. Organs began to shut down. Bruce Apar was holding his son's hand and talking to him about Syracuse's victory over Manhattan in the NCAAs, but then he was asked to leave, and a half-dozen doctors circled his son's bed. Nurses were running toward them, pushing a machine that would maybe get Harrison more oxygen, everything getting frantic. Bruce and Elyse stood in the hallway, Bruce wearing a yarmulke, saying prayers, hoping this wasn't as bad as it looked.

At 9:10 Friday night, Harrison Apar's heart gave out. He was buried on Monday. The outpourings and hugs have come nonstop, especially last night, when most of a school turned out to remember a 37-inch sophomore who had changed their lives.

For a recent school assignment, Harrison Apar had to write a story celebrating his 100th birthday. He wrote of his rich and diverse life, his Pulitzer Prize, his career in newspapers and at ESPN, and all the books he'd written, including his autobiography, "Looking Up: The World As I Know It."

As he got to the end, Harrison Apar wrote of himself, "His perspective on life was unique, one that no one had ever considered before. He knew thousands of people, and he rarely met an individual that disliked him."

Harrison Apar had written the truth, and as they filed out of the Yorktown High gym last night, everyone found comfort in that.

"I cannot imagine my son being anyone but Harrison," Bruce Apar said.