

Dear Shafonia,

I just wanted to thank you for all the years you've been my coach. You knew me back when I was an awkward little eighth grader and I'm sure it's been rewarding to see me grow into an awkward (slightly taller) junior in high school. It's meant a lot to me to have you as a coach, but more importantly, a role model, all these years.

I will still never be sure how I made the Spike Sport National team my 8<sup>th</sup> grade year, but I'm sure you had something to do with it. You believed in me and my skills. When I was on the team, you mentored me and helped me improve immensely. I would not have made my high school team if it were not for your supportive coaching-- I am sure of this. If I had not made my school team, I would have a completely different identity and group of friends. This is weird for me to think about... It's so apparent that volleyball has impacted my life in so many beautiful ways.

Even more than my growth in skill, you have made me grow personally into a better person. You have taught me so many things, but among the most important: You taught me that there are times for seriousness as well as times to joke around. You taught me that as long as you try, you can never fail. You taught me that standing up for yourself and your beliefs is never a wrong thing. You have taught me that even if other people underestimate you, you should never underestimate yourself. These lessons I will take with me for the rest of my life.

Probably the most important thing you shared with me was your love for volleyball. I have learned to love the game just like you have shown me to. Friends can't understand how I can put up with all the volleyball I play, and all the things I miss out on. I try to explain it to them, but they don't understand. If you are completely dedicated to something that you love, it doesn't feel like you're missing out on anything.

After school season ends this year, I will be volleyball-free for the first time in my life since the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. I honestly do not know what I will do with myself. (I know I will get fatter...and I will miss you a lot, I know this too.) You have been there for me as a coach, a friend, and a mentor. You have inspired me to always try my hardest in everything I do. You have encouraged me to never settle with ordinary, but always to strive for extraordinary. I hope I will one day teach someone as much as you have taught me. Thank you for all you have done. I hope we will stay in touch!

Love,

Grace Fletcher