

My name is Francisco Damato, and I am an aggressive big mountain snowboarder. I ride goofy, and have been snowboarding for five years now. During the winter months, I try to spend as much time as I can at my home mountain of Jay Peak, Vermont. Every day I go up, I look to do something new. This could be attempting a new trick, or finding a new side hit. I push myself to keep the sport interesting by progressing my skill and, most importantly, having fun. When I succeed at new things, or even just attempt, I consider them big accomplishments. I always try to keep a positive and adventurous attitude when I am on the mountain.

I am grateful for my parents because they both support me, and encourage me, in my adventures on the mountain. By taking the initiative to locate local seasonal rentals, they were able to ensure I have comfortable and quality gear as my body grows and my skill increases. Without their help, I would not be the rider I am today. I am really lucky that my mother has worked at one of the gear shops directly on the mountain for the past two seasons, and riding up with her means I can get to the mountain early and prepared. Sometimes, if there is good snowfall the night before, I see if I'm able to skip school and go enjoy the deep powder that gives me the safety and confidence to try new things. Since I have the ability to go to Jay on such short notice, I prioritize staying up to date on school work, so if I miss class time I can quickly make it up.

In 2023 I wanted to really improve my riding, so my parents and I looked into a program known as the Jay Peak FreeSki and Ride Team where groups are organized by snowboarding or skiing, age, and level of aggression. For the first half of the program in 2023, there was only one other rider in my group, so we both received one on one instruction. One of my biggest mentors at this time was my coach, Timmah Whitten. He helped me get out of my comfort zone and taught me different methods of approaching features such as powder, bigger jumps, cliffs, park features, and more. I am grateful for the opportunity to have received coaching from Timmah, because without his help I would not have the confidence or skill that I have today. Due to the progression I gained through the program, I was lucky enough to have the opportunity given by my parents to allow me to return this year.

It was through the Free Ski and Ride Team I got to experience one of my favorite adventures so far, which took place in the 2023-2024 ski season. One of my free ski coaches and I took the Tram to the top of Jay Peak, and hiked up to the summit. A few staircases and rock steps later, we reached the top and started towards one of the chutes known as Pump House. We had to walk along the ridgeline, which was exposed to other chutes and drop-offs, in snow that was up to our knees. This made the trek even more exciting and fun. Once we saw the first entrance to the chute, we strapped in and made our way down the ridgeline towards fresh powder. The entrance

was steep and narrow, so we had to go one at a time. Once my coach slowly slid into the chute, he descended quickly and skillfully. When I dropped in, I immediately knew it would be the perfect condition for navigating and playing around. I especially enjoyed this adventure because of the big reward our small trek gave us; I had just as much fun traveling to the chute as I did with the ride down.

One skill I look forward to building this season is riding switch. This is very important for me to improve, as it sets a foundation to push my riding to the next level. For example, mastering riding switch will enable me to land switch confidently if I were to do a 180, 540, etc. Additionally, riding switch will also help in other situations where I might not have room to reposition myself, such as if I am cliffed out, or caught up in areas with tight trees. I work on riding switch as much as I can when I am on a groomed run or on a flatter spot.

I love and appreciate all that Vermont's slopes have to offer, and I look forward to exploring life by traveling to other places around the world to snowboard. A few places that I have always wanted to go snowboard at are Mammoth, California, Revelstoke, British Columbia, and mountain faces in the Alaskan backcountry. I am very excited about the possibility of traveling and hope this scholarship can help me on my journey. I have only been snowboarding in Vermont at lower-altitude mountains such as Burke

Mountain and Jay Peak. If I get the chance to go to Kirkwood this year, it will be a significant change in conditions for me and an incredible experience to be able to travel for something I love doing that I will remember for a long time.

It is with gratitude that I submit this request. Thank you to the Flyin' Ryan Foundation for taking the time to read this and for your consideration. See you out there!