

FLYIN RYAN ADVENTURE SCHOLARSHIP BIOGRAPHY: AMAN DESHMUKH

I am a rising senior at Foothill High School in Pleasanton, California, where I was the pole vaulting captain for two years until I sustained a spinal cord injury during track practice in March 2025. This life changing event left me in a power wheelchair, with limited hand function and no leg function as a quadriplegic, but did not change my core identity as a resilient, positive, fun-loving, adventure-seeking teenager who loves connecting with people and contributing to the community. Since my injury, I have used adaptive equipment to try out rock climbing, swimming, scuba diving, biking, and soccer, and set up a student athlete safety awareness program. My goal is to continue living life to the fullest, with the tremendous support of family and friends, and to give back to the community by raising awareness for sports safety as well as accessible design and education.

FLYIN RYAN ADVENTURE SCHOLARSHIP PERSONAL ESSAY: AMAN DESHMUKH

"You can take the boy out of track but you can't take track out of the boy." March 6, 2026 saw me at the pole vaulting pit where I had a traumatic spinal cord injury exactly one year prior that left me paralyzed below the shoulders. This year, I thought it was important to show up for my track teammates. In a nutshell, this is who I continue to be: a team player, an adventurer who loves trying out new things and pushing myself to the limit, whether in adaptive sports, academics, rehab, or community service.

If 2025 was about finding my way around the new normal, 2026 for me is all about trying to hone in on what an active lifestyle means for me within sports, extracurricular activities, and academics. I intend to use scholarship funds toward an activity-based summer camp for spinal cord injury- impacted teens organized by EmpowerSCI in Rhode Island at the end of July 2026. This one week long "Summer Intensive Program" (SIP) residential camp will be the first time I am away from my family since the accident, directing my personal care with attendants who help me through the numerous activities of daily living with which I need assistance: transferring from bed to wheelchair, grooming, dressing, eating. More importantly, I am excited to try out adventure activities within the camp such as surfing, biking, hiking, and swimming. As a Boy Scout who loves the outdoors and has been an instructor at a Scouting summer camp, this will be the perfect way for me to challenge myself while having fun. Here are my anticipated costs for the SIP camp towards which I would be able to use the scholarship money if selected:

ITEM	COST
EmpowerSCI Summer Intensive Program participation fee	\$0 (grant received from NorCalSCI Foundation)
Airfare to and from Rhode Island	\$1500
Accessible van rental in Rhode Island	\$2000

Learning about Flyin Ryan has inspired me to continue on my path to being positive, grateful, and connected with my community in the face of adversity. The core values exercise has been particularly valuable in helping me align with what drives me and gives me purpose. Using terminology from my passion for pole vaulting, I have identified these core values which will help me tremendously in my journey forward:

1. Leap to Possibility: I launch towards possibility with courage and conviction, knowing that every pole vault begins with a commitment to move forward, even when the landing is uncertain.
2. Lock In for Service: I plant my life's pole in service of the larger community, whether it is other spinal cord injury survivors, individuals with disability, sustainability focused organizations, or my peers.
3. Change with the Wind: I am attuned to my environment and creative in finding ways to overcome challenges, troubleshooting with resilience to turn obstacles into opportunities.

4. Maintain Balance: I strive to balance ambition with gratitude, and recognize that success is not just clearing the bar, but being thankful for the journey and the people that carried me there.
5. Make Landing the New Beginning: Just as each landing in pole vault is the beginning of the next launch, I embrace living life to the fullest and discovering new adventures within my new normal.

I am grateful for all the support that the people around me have provided all my life, and especially post-injury, and intend to pay it forward by advocating for student athlete safety as well as for inclusive design, especially within transportation design (my intended college major.) It is an honor to be considered for the Flyin Ryan Adventure Scholarship. Thank you very much for the opportunity to share my story.