

GREECE, NY -- It's an incredible story that everyone in the nation is talking about.

It happened in Greece, NY, where a high school basketball manager came off the bench and started shooting the lights out.

The star of the video is 17-year-old Jason McElwain from Greece Athena High School.

Jason is autistic. He wasn't a player -- just a manager -- until he came off the bench and in four minutes scored 20 points.

He hit six 3-point shots as the home crowd went berserk.

McElwain is 5 feet 6 inches tall, but he felt 10 feet tall and his numbers were remarkable for any player at any level.

He was taken off the court on the shoulders of his teammates.

It was the stuff of Hollywood, but it was real.

Senior Jason McElwain had been the manager of the varsity basketball team of Greece Athena High School in Rochester, N.Y.

McElwain, who's autistic, was added to the roster by coach Jim Johnson so he could be given a jersey and get to sit on the bench in the team's last game of the year.

Johnson hoped the situation would even enable him to get McElwain onto the floor a little playing time.

He got the chance, with Greece Athena up by double-digits with four minutes go to.

And, in his first action of the year, McElwain missed his first two shots, but then sank six three-pointers and another shot, for a total of 20 points in three minutes.

"My first shot was an air ball (missing the hoop), by a lot, then I missed a lay-up," McElwain recalls. "As the first shot went in, and then the second shot, as soon as that went in, I just started to catch fire."

"I've had a lot of thrills in coaching," Johnson says. "I've coached a lot of wonderful kids. But I've never experienced such a thrill."

The crowd went wild, and his teammates carried the excited McElwain off the court.

"I felt like a celebrity!" he beamed.

McElwain's mother sees it as a milestone for her son.

"This is the first moment Jason has ever succeeded (and could be) proud of himself," reflects Debbie McElwain. "I look at autism as the Berlin Wall, and he cracked it." His teammates couldn't be happier.

"He's a cool kid," says guard Levar Goff. "You just get to know him, get used to being around him. A couple of weeks ago, he missed practice because he was sick. You feel different when he's not around. He brings humor and life to the team."

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Alone in the gym after practice, Jason McElwain went through his elaborate pregame ritual. The 17-year-old senior, manager of the Greece Athena High School basketball team, drained a 3-pointer, a double-pump layup and a free throw, kissed the back of his ring finger at center court and sped off to the dressing room to exhort and amuse his teammates.

"You've gotta give it everything you got!" McElwain sang in rap verse. "The winner goes home all happy/The loser goes home and says/'Mommy we lost the game, wah wah wah!'"

McElwain, who is autistic, was back in his role as an all-around motivator on the eve of a sectional semifinal game Tuesday night - handing out water bottles, dispensing tips, helping run drills. Two weeks earlier, he suited up for a game and delivered a jaw-dropping performance.

His play drew national attention, and a flood of calls from Hollywood. His parents have received inquiries from about 25 production companies ranging from The Walt Disney Co. and Warner Bros. to independent documentary filmmakers.

"I don't know what I'm walking into," McElwain said.

In his team's final home game of the season, McElwain entered with four minutes to go. It was his first and only appearance for the Athena varsity team in this Rochester suburb. The 5-foot-6 manager hit six 3-point shots and a 2-pointer and was carried off the court on his teammates' shoulders.

His triumph was captured on a student video that made the rounds of the television networks. The school was besieged with calls and e-mails from parents of children who have autism, a little-understood developmental disorder.

"We have an obligation as a society to find a way to include people with different abilities," said the school's athletic director, Randolph Hutto, whose 12-year-old son, Joshua, is autistic. "This, hopefully, will help open doors for some people, or open some eyes."

McElwain, who didn't begin talking until he was 5, still lacks social skills but has learned to cope well in his teens, said his special-education teacher, Diane Maddock.

"He might talk a little loud, laugh a little too long or not be able to read the body language or even the tone of voice of a person, but it's not a big difficulty," Maddock said. "If you call him on it, he will acknowledge it, say 'OK, you're right, I shouldn't have said that or laughed when I laughed.'"

"This couldn't happen to a nicer kid," she added.

Considered too small to make the junior varsity, McElwain signed on as manager, then took up the same role with the varsity to stay near the sport he loves. Amazed at his dedication, coach Jim Johnson had him suit up for the home finale. There was no guarantee he would play - Athena was battling for a division title - but he got in when the Trojans opened a large lead.

"It was like a big old bucket and I was just hitting them like they were free throws," McElwain said. "I just felt relaxed."

The coach couldn't believe what he was seeing.

"He's been my right-hand man, he's there every day and just getting him the opportunity to suit up was emotional enough for me," he said. "For him to come in and seize the moment like he did was certainly more than I ever expected. I was an emotional wreck."

Because he played in just one regular-season game, McElwain was ineligible for sectional play. But he's not bothered.

"I just want to win as a team, not individually," he said. What's more, he prides himself on having a lot of friends.

"I'm not really that different," he said. "I don't really care about this autistic situation, really. It's just the way I am. The advice I'd give to autistic people is just keep working, just keep dreaming, you'll get your chance and you'll do it."

Jason's next goal: to graduate.