

Setting the curve, teacher says math student goes all

By Jessica Render
Special to the Reporter

Tyler Bruce, a 2012 Catoosa High School graduate, scored a near-perfect 35 on the math section of the ACT this year. A feat even the most exceptional student could be proud of. Bruce, however, isn't letting himself off so easy.

"I should have got it," Bruce said, speaking of the one question that prevented him from attaining that perfect score.

Bruce did manage to nab a perfect 5 out of 5 on his AP Calculus exam the same year and also boasted the top score in the state of Oklahoma on the Problem Solving Challenge Exam administered by the American Society for Mathematics, an exam that qualified him to represent his school in math on the national level. Bruce placed second in trigonometry during Connors State's academic competition despite having no formal schooling in the subject and only days to prepare.

With all these accolades piling up, one might be surprised to hear math wasn't always this star student's passion.

"It was just a class I could get an easy A in," Bruce said.

It wasn't until his senior year at CHS that things started to turn around for Bruce. Enrolled in a pre-calculus class, a devoted teacher quickly recognized his talents were being underestimated.

"It's unbelievable. He has exponentially progressed in math since coming here," said Johnnie Marshall, who taught Bruce in three separate math classes during his senior year. Bruce transferred into the Catoosa district



PHOTO BY JESSICA RENDER

Posing in a familiar environment, Tyler Bruce took three math classes with Ms. Marshall during his senior year and can still be found in the classroom many days this summer as he works on his online class.

from Owasso at the start of his sophomore year.

While Bruce always knew he had a knack for the subject, he credits Marshall for the increased motivation.

"I knew I was good at it. When I got to Ms. Marshall's class, that's when I really got interested," Bruce said. "She pushed me."

Marshall said she has a God-given sense to recognize potential in gifted individuals that even they may not realize.

"Even the average kid can do more than they think," Marshall said.

And according to Marshall, Bruce is no average kid.

"He is above and beyond a prodigy," she said. "We have a lot of smart kids, but Tyler's unique because he doesn't just put it all on the teacher. He will read and do his homework and be on your tail at every moment asking for more."

With no special programs in

place for gifted students in the public school system, Marshall knows it's up to her and other teachers to take a special interest in these individuals or they will not live up to their full potential.

While she's teaching at Catoosa, Marshall says students like Bruce are often left waiting for more challenges.

According to Bruce, Marshall's devotion has made all the difference.

"Oh, it's been extremely motivating. I wouldn't have worked as hard if it was just any other teacher," Bruce said.

Marshall isn't quite so sure. "I don't want to take the credit," Marshall said, agreeing it was a team effort. "It was just that if you have this ability, let's fine-tune it. Had I known [Bruce] had what he had to achieve and not take the time to show that interest, I shouldn't be teaching."

Bruce may have graduated in the spring but he hasn't left his teacher behind for the summer. The pupil enrolled in an online college math class, anxious to get some credits out before starting at the University of Tulsa.

Bruce plans to major in mechanical engineering and hopes to do some work in the oil industry. Marshall is sure his future will be a matter-of-fact.

"His name is going to be on more than once in the next few years, I can promise you. That's not putting any pressure on him, that's just going to happen," Marshall said.

Marshall is excited about the opportunities she knows teaching will provide Bruce and to help all students see how math is used in a variety of

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Teacher says math student goes above and beyond



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place for gifted students in the public school system, Marshall knows it's up to her and other teachers to take a special interest in these individuals or they may not live up to their full potential.

While she's teaching at a level to fit with the needs of the rest of the class, Marshall says students like Bruce are often left waiting.

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"Oh, it's been extremely important. I wouldn't have worked as hard if it was just any other teacher," Bruce said.

Marshall isn't quite so sure.

"I don't want to take the credit," Marshall said, agreeing to call it a team effort. "It was just 'you have this ability, let's fine tune it.' Had I known [Bruce] had what he had to achieve and not taken the time to show that interest then I shouldn't be teaching."

Bruce may have graduated this spring but he hasn't left his books behind for the summer. The star pupil enrolled in an online college math class, anxious to knock some credits out before starting at the University of Tulsa this fall.

Bruce plans to major in chemical engineering and hopes to pursue work in the oil industry. Marshall is sure his future success is a matter-of-fact.

"His name is going to come up more than once in the next 5-10 years, I can promise you that. That's not putting any pressure on him, that's just going to happen," Marshall said.

Marshall is excited for the opportunities she knows engineering will provide Bruce and tries to help all students understand math is used in a variety of differ-

ent career paths and could be essential to their futures.

"Math is used 10 times more than people realize. It's more than making change," Marshall said. Bruce agreed, adding math is applied to almost everything in life, from money management to cooking to calculating gas mileage.

"I know that without math we as a country are going to fall behind, without keeping students like him here and motivated," said Marshall, who is anxious for Bruce to get plugged in with a good mentor at TU who can guide him through his journey at the university level.

Marshall says it will be a two-way street for anyone willing to devote the time and attention she feels the student's talents demand.

"The return on the investment that they place in him will be triple and they're going to know it," Marshall said.

Still, Marshall isn't planning on bidding her now former student farewell just yet. The teacher intends to keep up with Bruce in this next phase of his life.

"He's going to be a lot smarter than I am someday, and almost probably there now."

Though everyone may not be blessed with the same natural affinity for advanced mathematical achievement as Bruce, both he and Marshall believe hard work pays off.

"With the right direction, kids can overcome anything, they can step up to the plate," Marshall said.

"Just work on it," Bruce said. "Ask for help, don't be afraid to ask questions."

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