The Physical Education Building on the UT Arlington campus is an unsung brown structure with a swimming pool and basketball court on its lower level. Walking through the hallway into the Movin’ Mavs’ offices, there’s an aura of something different going on as you enter into the basketball suite. There are articles, pictures and papers all over, as if you’ve stepped into some sort of library standing on its head. We have found the epicenter of what sport is truly about, the axis of sport changing lives for a power higher than university ego or the almighty dollar.

Head coach Doug Garner was at the office with former players Tyler Garner (the coach’s son), Jay Nelms, Juan Soto and current player Jan Gans. The hour they shared unveiled the basketball I knew as a kid, the one I had fallen in love with and seemingly lost through the cynicism and jadedness of today’s big business of high school and college athletics.

As Garner took me into the locker room, he pointed to an empty wheelchair: “Here, this should work. It’s not one of the best we have, but it will do.” I lowered into the base and tried to catch up to Nelms, Gans and Soto as they headed out to the court. I wasn’t exactly sure how to maneuver it. I spun the wheels gently to move forward and optimistic that I’d clear the space, but I knocked into the wall. I spun the wheels backwards and then forwards and finally I cleared the locker room and entered the basketball court.

Garner passed me the ball and asked me to give it a try, “Pull up, and let’s see what you got.” I lifted the ball up and released. Air ball. My first four of five shots were swishes and finally I cleared the locker room and entered the court. Meanwhile, Nelms and Soto went one-on-one. As Nelms exploded down the lane toward the basket, Soto turned the chair 90 degrees to stop Nelms’ drive. Nelms was able to get deep in the lane and then tilted his chair on one wheel to shoot the baby-hook shot. Score. Soto got the ball, trying to answer, but Nelms was too quick with his chair and tied Soto up with the ball.

These are athletes who train more rigorously than any on campus. They face more adversity than any other sports team, yet they are not considered part of UT athletics. The Movin’ Mavs are part of UT recreation. They follow all 290-plus rules in the NCAA handbook and compete for a national championship but fall outside the university’s interpretation of athletics. The disabled athlete has grown all too familiar with being left on the outside despite recent progress. Inclusion continues to be the elusive goal for the disabled.

Nelms is generally laughing and smiling, but to make sure his point came through, he stoically pointed out that there needs to be more education and interaction with those with disabilities. “You will be wheeling down the sidewalk or at the airport and parents are yelling their children out of the way as if I’m going to run them over. They have a horrified look on their face and they tell their children out of the way as if I’m going to run them over. They have a horrified look on their face and they tell their child something bad happened to that man (me). Come and ask me what happened; I was in a car wreck. It helps to talk about it and learn. Otherwise, that child is growing up and doing the same exact thing when they are a parent.”

Sports for people with disabilities gets back to what sports are all about: People having the opportunity to exercise, stay healthy and maximize what they can do with their life.

Leigh Klein is the owner of Five-Star Basketball.