

## **Pitch by William Klaver, the 'Student in the spotlight'**

Opening of the Academic Year, Monday 29 August 2016

Good afternoon everybody,

It's an honour to be invited to speak here. In the auditorium, at the centre of Erasmus University, where I spend the last seven years. Last week I uploaded my Bachelor Thesis Public Administration, so what a special way to leave this university.

Seven years ago I became a member of the volleyball club Erasmus Volley. Being a member, getting involved at Erasmus Sport and in the world of volleyball in Rotterdam, I developed two dreams. I wanted to give children in Rotterdam the chance to play volleyball. Also, I wanted to create the possibility of playing beachvolleyball in Rotterdam, which wasn't possible at the time. I think we've succeeded in realising both dreams.

Joining a sports club is not normal for all kids, especially here in Rotterdam. I wanted to change that. That is why I started a project, adopted by Erasmus Volley, to give children the chance to play volleyball in Rotterdam. With 15 volleyballs under the luggage strap of my bike I visited all the primary schools in Rotterdam

Noord, Center and Crooswijk to get children excited about volleyball. We started with a dream three years ago, the first practice was two years ago.

Now we want to have two teams of kids playing in the volleyball competition.

Students like Lilian, Kirsten and Maaïke give practice and organize things. They love to work with these kids, they help them practice volleyball and develop social skills. Our project is now supported by the city of Rotterdam, which facilitates similar initiatives in other sports and other neighbourhoods.

As a result of this project children get chances. One girl is dreaming to be in our national team. Another smashes a ball for 30 minutes, because she's angry at the world. Her brother was dealing drugs, got arrested and she was happy to leave this situation behind for a while. Our dream now is setting up a club, with parents and children taking care of the organisation themselves.

The other dream was about finding a place to play beach volleyball, with the World Championships in 2015 to come. With Richard and Martijn, who shared the same dream, we did find a beautiful place in Rotterdam Nesseland. Now it looks like **this** and 250 people, around 25% of them student, play beachvolleyball every week during summer. In 2014 Beach Club Rotterdam became the sportsclub of the

year in Rotterdam. But we already have new dreams: indoor beachvolleyball and more beach locations, so everyone in Rotterdam has access to this great sport.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have to be honest that another result of all those efforts is that my life as a student differs from the way I envisioned it. I started two bachelors at the same time, now I have finished one and quit the other one just before the finish line. I won't start a career in Public Administration **or** in Economics, but in volleyball, as a volleyball coach.

I had a love-hate relationship with the university system. I tried to find my way, made a lot of mistakes and stupid decisions, and sometimes I tried to change the system. Because of all this, it also feels strange to stand here as a student in the spotlight. Me? I'm far from a top-grade-student. I hope it is a sign of a changing university, a university that rewards contributions to society. A university that not only focuses on education and research, but also wants to create social value by supporting students who want to improve our city.

Erasmus University, I want to thank you for all the opportunities you gave me, and I wish you all will make your own dreams happen here in Rotterdam.