

Exclusive

Bye-bye breasts, hello wonderful new life

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At school, Scott Schulman heard taunts comparing him to his friends' mothers.

At the beach, his shirt never came off.

And in shirts-versus-skins basketball games, he was sidelined by breasts far too large for a boy.

"From the time I was 9 years old, I never put myself in a position where someone could see me without a shirt on," Schulman, 20, told the Daily News yesterday. "It was nonstop ridicule."

So when a state appeals court ruled that insurance giant GHI must pay \$5,000 for the breast-reduction surgery that Schulman underwent three years ago, he was extremely grateful.

"It's about time that a Joe Schmo can take on a big company and win," Schulman declared, speaking publicly for the first time. "Why can't the little guy win?"

Schulman's 52-year-old father, Steve, a salesman from Oceanside, L.I., represented himself in Small Claims Court and then all the way to the Appellate Division after the insurance giant refused to pay for the surgery.

The procedure, GHI said, was cosmetic and not essential.

But Scott Schulman, now a prelaw student at the State University of New York at Albany, said breast-reduction surgery was vital for him to live a normal life.

"It was a complete 180-degree turn in my life," he said. "I have a girlfriend now and I feel like I'm a whole new person."

For most of his life, the condition that left him with enlarged breasts - known as gynecomastia - was Schulman's biggest hurdle.

"I remember one time, I was at Six Flags in Ohio and we were going on this water ride," he said. "But when I got to the top, and they told me I would have to take my shirt off, I just walked all the way to the bottom."

Worse, he said, were the stinging names he heard from classmates. "They were so bad, I can't even bring myself to say them," he said.



Scott Schulman underwent a \$5,000 breast-reduction operation.

All along, Steve Schulman saw the surgery as a way for his son to escape his personal misery. He just didn't expect his insurance company to fight the bill.

"Whatever it cost, I would have done it," he said.

The prospect of going head-to-head with big-time lawyers didn't faze him either - until the case reached the Appellate Division on Madison Ave.

"I walked in there and it was like walking into the Supreme Court," he said.

The panel of judges ruled that GHI should pay for the operation, and criticized the company for downplaying just how much the condition affected Scott Schulman's state of mind.

Schulman said he hopes his case inspires other boys who are burdened with large breasts.

"I know there are thousands of others just like me," he said. "I want them to know that if they really want help, that they should go for it."

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