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Many assume that the most important high school learning experiences occur in the classroom. Although students garner pertinent knowledge within the walls of their schools, student athletes learn true life lessons on the playing field. In addition to benefiting from physical activity, those who participate in high school athletics graduate with crucial leadership, teamwork, and social skills that will help them for the remainder of their lives.

In high school, I have been a varsity athlete in three sports: field hockey, soccer, and swimming. During my tenure as a proud Seaford Blue jay athlete, I have experienced both major victories and heartbreaking losses. My experience in sports has taught me how to remain humble and gracious while winning. As goalie of Seaford High School's field hockey team, I am keenly aware of the pain of defeat; I am able to empathize with the opponents who have lost. Additionally, sports have taught me how to persevere and overcome a pattern of losses. In my sophomore year of field hockey, we ended the season with a depressing 5-10-1 record. I could have let this unsuccessful season, and the scrutiny associated with being the goalie of a losing team, defeat me. However, my sports background had taught me perseverance. I was determined to succeed; I practiced hard, attended camps, and ultimately, in my junior year, helped my team secure a berth in the state tournament and even snagged the 1<sup>st</sup> Team All Conference Goalie honor.

Sports have also taught me how to be a leader. On the swim team, I stepped up and helped rookie swimmers learn strokes, taught them how to dive, and even lined them up for their events. I offered to swim the unpopular events, such as the 100 yard butterfly and the 500 yard freestyle, in order to help the team succeed. Additionally, as field hockey goalie, I was the leader of the defense. I coordinated the defense, ran plays, and designed defensive strategies that helped us succeed. In my senior year, I was appointed Captain and took on more responsibility by initiating our new sportsmanship program.

Finally, sports have taught me how to be a team player and cooperate with others. In soccer, though I have been on varsity since freshman year, I am not the star of the team; I am a utility player who plays wherever the team needs me. Soccer has taught me how to support my team, despite not receiving much credit for my efforts. Last year, I had to make the ultimate sacrifice for the sake of the team: I had to miss the season. I was in a college calculus class that had night classes, meaning I would miss about half of the games in the season. Though it was a difficult decision, I knew that it would not be fair to the team to miss the majority of the games, and I ultimately decided to miss a season of a sport that I loved in order to be a better team player.

Sports truly are a microcosm of life; they incorporate all types of life lessons, both on and off the field. High school athletics have given me tremendous skills. As a result of my time spent as an athlete, I am now able to graduate high school with leadership and teamwork skills that I am certain will help me succeed. Additionally, sports have given me the mindset and ability to handle and appreciate the rollercoaster of successes and failures that is life. I honestly believe that I would not be the strong, motivated, and supportive person I am today without high school athletics.