

Common Application Personal Statement

Topic #5: Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.

I love the game of football and in sixth grade I decided I wanted to play on a team. I was sure it would be great. I picked up my equipment a few days before the first practice and strolled in thinking this would be easy. However, it was a disaster! I was out of shape, the coach yelled all the time, and I was completely unprepared. I went home devastated and refused to go back. The failure and embarrassment stuck with me and at the end of my freshman year of high school I wanted to try again. I attended team meetings, started working out, signed up for a skills camp, and attended practices – but this time I didn't quit, and I made the team.

Our high school football team traditionally was not very good, but my coach understood our potential. One night, he watched a television program about another high school team a few states away that was one of the best in the country, and decided he wanted us to play that team. While the other team was not interested, in the alternative, my coach asked what team in that area was the toughest and meanest team that no one wanted to play. It turned out to be a reform school and he scheduled a game for the following season.

When the day finally came, we climbed into the buses at our comfortable, upper-middle class high school and traveled a few hours to the reform school. We felt out of place the moment we arrived. We stayed in a room with bars on the windows until it was time to warm up – it felt like a prison. The other team arrived after us and as they took the field the line of players seemed to go on forever. They outnumbered us 3 to 1 and were much bigger and tougher looking than we were. In fact, I will never forget lining up on my first play against an opposing player that had his initials carved into his arm by what I can only guess had been a razor blade.

Under the guidance of our wise coach, we focused, played valiantly and competed well, but we lost by a touchdown. Afterwards, our coach assembled the team together and began pacing and shaking his head. We were convinced he was going to start yelling, but instead he turned to one of the other adults and said: "They really messed up, didn't they?" and the response came back in the affirmative. Then my coach looked at us and explained that we had messed up not because we had lost but because we had proven that we could compete with the biggest and toughest team. Therefore, we could no longer hide behind excuses for not playing hard and winning when we returned home. It took us all by surprise, but it changed our outlook and gave us confidence. We returned home a new team.

We had a historic season that year. We went undefeated in the regular season and were the top team in the Washington D.C. area. While we did eventually lose in the semi-finals of the state tournament, the experience was the pinnacle of all of our young lives. We learned how to win, we learned how to push ourselves to new limits, and we gained a new level of confidence. This experience was particularly sweet for me as I remembered back to sixth grade and how far I had come from the boy who quit after one practice.

As I look forward to college, I want to continue to embody these principles and be someone who tries hard, pushes his limits, has confidence, and does not hide behind excuses.