

An essay – as seen through the eyes of a graduating High School senior, on how his ice hockey experiences have been of value to his life.

By
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Sometimes you come across a quote that is so timeless, that it continues to speak out era after era, for generations. As Charles Dickens' once said, most-likely commenting on his own personal life, in, "A Tale of Two Cities. 'It was the best of times and it was the worst of times.'

Although my ordinary life may not really compare to that of the famous author, I understand what he was saying and feel compelled to draw the comparison.

To this point, I have had a life that I have thoroughly enjoyed yet I too, have had my share of difficult lessons learned. As with all people, my early, formative years have contributed many, many factors that shaped the child into a young adult. However, only a very select few, really stand out. For me, the "stand outs" have been ice hockey, my mentality in school, and my parents' influence on my life. Maybe not necessarily in that order, but, the line is blurred, between where one influence begins and the next one picks up. What I do know, is that alone, these three components are neither life changing nor rare, but together, they accumulate to form who I am today.

From a young age, my parents had engrained the idea of hard work into my mind. They preached that school was my priority, my full time job, and that "any job worth doing was worth doing right." Even as a very small child, it would simply irritate me to do an assignment, or a household chore half-heartedly or even worse, leave it incomplete. If I decided to take on a mission, it got all of my effort. When it came to school, relationships, and even just having fun, I always strived to meet the potential of the situation. This is my approach toward life.

Hockey was no different. When I first started playing as a Mite at age 7, I had no idea of the magnitude of "the journey into myself" that I was about to commence. You don't just play hockey, you live hockey. This game is like no other game. It pushes you in ways that most people laugh at when I describe them in detail. It pushes you physically, it pushes you mentally and it pushes you emotionally. You might ask, what could one really be learning out there on the ice that may come in handy at a job one day? Hockey has honed my "life skills" in a way that no other sport possibly could. And, I don't think I would have drawn this same conclusion four, short years ago.

Since hockey requires a sheet of ice, and random sheets of ice are nowhere near as accessible here on Long Island, as a soccer or football field, the game tends to be played at obscure hours of the day...hours that most kids are oblivious to. Throughout my high school life, I have found myself needing to be on the ice anytime from 4 a.m. to 11:30 p.m. And it is true, as a rule teens do keep absurd hours, however, I guarantee, only I am getting checked into a wall at 11:00 on any given night. There have been countless times

where I find myself talking to friends, as they are about to go to bed from a long day of school, and I end the conversation with “goodnight...I’m going to hockey now”. Now, you might be wondering why I didn’t just quit if I no longer liked the commitment? My reasons were twofold:

First, I can’t do anything half-heartedly. I committed to hockey at a young age, before I fully understood the arduous of hours of work and the obstacles it would throw at me in high school.

And secondly, I persevered because I loved the people who I played with. There were my teammates. They counted on me. As I look back on all those Tuesday and Thursday night practices, I can visualize myself looking around the locker room, staring at the guys I had grown up with over the years, in the various leagues... at all the people on my team. And suddenly, I realized that I was different from them. It didn’t matter what time of the night it was to them, the locker room antics continued, and they all just seemed to be so carefree. Me, I was there, but I had so much else running through my mind. The tests I had in the morning, the homework or project that still needed finishing. The kids I was with in the locker, however, didn’t seem passed by school, and it never crossed their mind during a game or practice. I was the one who skated through the practices brainstorming essay ideas or working out homework problems in the back of my mind. I had books in the car, so I could cram in last minute facts on the ride to the game. What’s with that? Those guys hit the showers and slept like babies after a great game. I showered and burning the midnight oil until it was time to eat breakfast! Then I realized that I was a rare breed of hockey player... one of the few who found a way to enjoy the “thrill of the game” while keeping my academics in check.

As my courses became harder, it seemed as though my hockey games were getting later, and for me, juggling the schedule of now being on two teams was becoming crazier. For the first time in my mind, hockey was becoming an unnecessary burden to my already challenging high school life. Face it, I knew I played decent defense, but I was never going to the NHL, maybe now it was time to quit? But, no the chill of the ice, the sound of a slap shot against the walls, the breeze that I could still feel from the swish of my opponents skates, slashing across the ice, was in my blood... in between shifts, my heart racing and recovering for my next time in, I watched the plays intensely, saw the games unfolded, and through the cage of my sweaty helmet, I gained new *perspective*. Suddenly, in all the fury and excitement of the bench, I felt some sort of clarity.

It may have been during practice drills, or at the first push off of my skates dropping onto the ice and day or night of the week, including weekends, that I added to my newly found perspective, *priority*. As a defenseman, I had to know the right time to take the penalty to keep them from scoring, without spending too much time in the box. If I could prioritize my game strategy on the fly, then certainly, I could prioritize my life schedule and meet my goals.

Time management was the crucial component, but it was only going to be attainable after, I had found perspective and priority. It was from there I used my game skills and discipline to teach myself how to manage my time, making quick adjustments on the fly

to pull off the grades, still getting endless hours of enjoyment from the sport I had grown up with.

Finally, I exhibited a form of *perseverance* that even surprised me. Having perspective, being able to prioritize, learning how to time budget and toughing out a bad situation while never losing sight of my ultimate goals, proves to me that I can be unique in whatever I choose to do.

Yes, hockey brought me here. Not my parents, not my teachers, not even my coaches. It was my love of the game, and wanting it to successfully fit into the way I saw my career path turning. I apply this basic philosophy in my approach to everything and everyone I encounter. I love experiencing new things... I'm open to exploring all different aspects of life, on and off the ice, and finding out which experiences will make such an impression, that they will become part of my very fiber.

I am a "prioritizer", with passion and perspective. If I had allowed myself to quit in the worst of times... I wouldn't have become this person, in the best of times. Moreover, I never want to chance missing out on something potentially life changing... like hockey.