

Question: First experiences can be defining. Cite a first experience that you have had and explain its impact on you.

Worth Fighting For

I kicked it as hard as I could with exactly the right part of my foot. I remembered my first coach telling me when I was a small agile six-year old, “Sara, use the inside of your laces when you want to kick the ball hard.” I ran to the other end of the field to retrieve my “dying” soccer ball, “dying” because I had played with it so much it was on the verge of being deflated and useless. I remembered all the adulation I used to get about my soccer skills, and I wondered where I had gone wrong. I used to be one of the best, revered by my coach and known to all the other coaches as “someone to look out for.”

From the time I was eight to the time I was twelve, the perception of my soccer skills, and the skills themselves I admit slowly atrophied. Other players were flourishing and pushing me off my pedestal of glory and recognition. I landed upon unfamiliar territory: the once familiar field seemed foreign and unruly. I couldn’t maneuver as I used to, but nevertheless, I put aside my growing frustration and concentrated on enjoying the game. I received adequate playing time because the American Youth Soccer Organization (AYSO) supports the motto, “Everyone Plays.” Although I was working hard to improve and succeed, I wasn’t moving up in the ranks. When I got to high school, I realized that the AYSO motto, “Everyone Plays,” no longer pertained. I learned that I couldn’t earn playing time just by working hard and having a good relationship with the coach; if I wasn’t good enough, I wasn’t going to play. What really irked me were my good friends on the team. It seemed that their nonchalant attitude was rewarded, while my love of soccer was quashed. They had a penchant for joking around and ignoring the coach. While they got starting positions, I sat on the bench.

I decided not to take this sitting down ... on the bench. Subsequently, I picked myself up and explored other avenues through which I could satisfy my love of soccer. I applied to AYSO and was approved to coach a team of ten and eleven year olds girls. The parents on the team were skeptical of me – they were not convinced that a sixteen year old girl was responsible enough to take care of their children. After all, I was up against seven middle-age men who had been coaching since I was born. I struggled and am still struggling to find the balance between begin a friend, role model, authority figure and entertainer. I spent the season teaching my team everything I knew about soccer. We made it all the way to the single elimination round in the semifinals.

I watched the girls on my team moving to open space to support each other, calling for the ball, and giving 100 percent effort. They had actually listened to me and were doing all the things I had spent the entire season nagging them to do. They were using the skills I had taught them and playing their hearts out. Of course, they wanted to win, but I explained a very important lesson to them that I had just learned; playing itself was the most significant goal. After having been benched in high school, for me just getting to play was winning.

My coaching experience fulfilled my needs temporarily, but I was not both mentally and physically ready to focus on myself as a player. I went through fall training at high school with the attitude that I had put in the work and was ready to make the Varsity in November. Unfortunately, the coach didn't agree with me and told me I would do a great job as captain of JV. I tried to make the most of JV and to use all the feedback I could get to better myself both as a person and a soccer player, but I was devastated that I was working so hard and not succeeding. Toward the end of the season in February, I got a call from the Varsity coach saying that he wanted me to move up and join Varsity in CIF. The best things in life don't come easy, but they are worth fighting for.