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English II Honors

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Final Copy - Spit, Sweat, and Grit: A Wrestler's Story

Being the guinea pig oldest child in the family with no older brothers to explore the realms of the future and seven others who needed the ground tested for them, I started shakily off into the amazing world of sports. My early ill-fated attempts at sports were certainly not favorable. To put it simply, I was an automatic failure at any sport that I tried.

I started with soccer, the culmination of the experience being the only goal I ever scored-on my own team’s goal, despite the shouts of my teammates and father, purple with rage. As we quickly realized, after three years, that soccer was most definitely not my sport, my dad plopped all the kids into cross country, which despite requiring almost no skill at all, I still managed to be horrible at. The culmination of this sports experiment proved to be me passing out in the blazing sun from exhaustion and not being noticed until just before my family was about to load up in the big van and leave the meet.

The last elementary school attempt was basketball, the worst of all the sports I tried. I, as all Catholic boys did, joined the traditional parochial school league where some idiot kid’s dad who actually took his son’s sport seriously would be the coach. I was more of a menace to my team than help, and so my coaches would grit their teeth and send that little Bellet kid into the game when the team was down by no less than fifty points and there were about three minutes left in the game, a position in which I could do the least damage. I guess the reason for this was my excessive shortness. So since I was
shorter than everyone in the elementary school league and could not catch and shoot a basketball any more than I could a watermelon, I resorted, sometimes at the encouragement of my coaches and out of my own frustration, to fouling myself out of the game.

I was after basketball that I came to Montgomery Bell Academy, a school with a sport I had never seen before: wrestling. I immediately identified it as the perfect sport—your opponent was just as small as you were, you could foul all you wanted to, and above all, you didn’t have to deal with circular flying objects. Junior school wrestling went by with relative success, but high school wrestling, as I chose to keep wrestling, was a whole new deal - more serious and challenging.

I was then that I met coach Simpson, the progenitor of three state champions, and bearer of the title Head Wrestling Coach, with a mean looking face, stout, obstinate looking body, and a strict moral code. I am sure that many great and influential coaches out there teach kids lifelong values about life through the game all throughout the season, but right at the beginning, coach Simpson gave us his rules to live by. They are the “three do’s” – “do what’s right, do your best, and do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

Once again my lightness of body came to my disadvantage. Weighing only 103 lbs., with no-one else to wrestle light weight for varsity, I was chosen to be the light weight for the wrestling team, forced to work out with the big boys, become the butt of every one of coach Simpson’s jokes, and the example of what not to do in every practice. I remember sitting with the other wrestlers and feel the vibration of fear down my spine when I would hear coach chuckle derisively and, just for the humor of my ineptness at a
move say "Alright, who wants to see Be-let try to do this move this move!" Through these experiences coach Simpson gave me a nickname unintentionally. "Damiit" As in "Damiit Be-let, if you do that move wrong one more time, I’m gonna bust yer gizzard." At first I took these insults to heart, but then realized that they were for the benefit of the team, not because coach particularly disliked me.

Soon it was Christmas break and the practices were every day and went on for three hellish hours. It was then that I did something highly disadvantageous to any lightweight wrestler and completely inexcusable to coach Simpson; I started growing. This led to gaining of weight, which meant that I would have to start dieting and losing weight to stay in my weight class. I began to get even skinnier than I had already been. In addition, I also buzzed my hair, partly because I thought it would help me make weight and partly because I thought it would look cool; I was wrong in both assumptions. I succeeded in making myself look like a cancer victim during the holocaust: an emaciated child with no hair.

Then, one night, I did something very stupid. Probably crazy from hunger and studying for exams, I had a small, innocent, tasty looking Junior Bacon Cheeseburger, forgetting that the day following was a tournament. When I stepped on the scale, my weight registered about 106 lbs: three pounds over the weight limit. I had already excreted everything in me, and had nothing left to lose. Coach Simpson saw it, and I knew that I was about to go through a very painful process.

What most people don’t get about wrestling is why wrestlers cut weight. The whole concept is self-sacrifice. If you love your sport and team enough you will lose weight in order not to forfeit points. So when people see wrestlers in a corner spitting or
sweating profusely, it is not sadistic, it is not wrong, it is learning to dedicate everything, down to your last drop of sweat, to the success of your team. This is what, in large part, makes wrestling a team sport - the success of the team relies on the sacrifices made by each individual wrestler.

I then proceeded to spend the next couple of hours in about six layers of sweatshirts, running and spitting until my coaches said to stop. I lay down in the back of the bus next to the heater, in my mummification suit. As wave after wave slowly came over me, it felt as if I was being suffocated. My sweat pores started to open up and give off liquid. When we got to the tournament I started running laps, which were hard to do considering I could barely breathe and hardly see due to the cloying heat and sweat dripping off my face. Then, just as I felt I was about to die, I asked coach Simpson if I could go weigh in. He saw the question as rather humorous and told me to keep running. Dying was apparently not an option, so I kept on running, feeling a little lightheaded due to lack of bodily fluids. Finally, I heard the call to weigh in.

After a long period of peeling off layer after layer of sweat-drenched clothing, I stood shivering in my underwear, and became very cold. I was still soaked in sweat, and the moisture, exposed to air, lowered my body temperature. So, I dried myself off with a towel and stood on the scale, my heart and body completely still in trepidation of what the result would be. Soon the numbers came up-102.1 lbs. I was .9 lbs. under, and could not be more happy and exhausted. I stepped off the scale, a pitiful, shivering, and unbelievably skinny creature.

Three Gatorades later, I realized that although I had spent much time making weight, it was now time to wrestle, and this is why I love wrestling-just when you think
you have used up all your strength, exhausted all your resources, you have to keep going and find some strength inside of you that you didn’t know was there before, and use it to its full potential. That is why coach Simpson has such uncompromising expectations, and that is why being a wrestler requires so much discipline. Wrestling is the toughest sport.