

Common Application Essay Prompt #2
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The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?

I stepped into the gym on the first day of tryouts with an eager expression, ready for my junior season of varsity badminton. As the new captain, I had so many aspects of the team that I desired to improve and achievements I wanted to accomplish, starting from creating an inclusive team environment and winning a CIF championship. However, our disadvantaged team was in for another challenging year after losing many seniors the past year and constantly being treated as a “second level” sport.

Because our coach worked three jobs, our team had to operate with our coach being absent for more than half of the season’s practices and games. I tried my best to fill in the countless blanks the coach’s absences left by leading as a coach, a captain, and a player. As a captain, I encouraged others to cheer at games and increase the team spirit, managed the team’s social media, planned team dinners, and communicated with the school sports administration about release times and uniforms. Wanting to upgrade our sports uniforms, I designed new team jerseys and customized jackets to make our team look more professional.

Having no coach, it was difficult for amateur players to learn proper footwork and strokes without injuring themselves. I decided to cover for the coach’s absences because I believed that despite the coach’s situation, all players should have a fair chance at trying and improving. To do this, I attended afternoon and night practices, even when nonmandatory, for both varsity and JV practices.

As a coach, managing a varsity team of 22 by myself was challenging, but our varsity players desperately needed to unite as a team as well as refine their skills as individuals. Four times a week, I used my past experience in competition-level training to create and lead entertaining, yet effective drills at practice, altering them to specific teammates’ strengths and weaknesses. Similarly, our JV players required one-on-one attention, where I taught them basic footwork, how to swing the racket, and how to strategize through the game.

At games, I watched my teammates’ matches meticulously and gave them advice during breaks. In order to make the roster, as per my coach’s request, I asked my teammates who they coordinated best with and placed them in events they succeeded in, incorporating their opinions into the lineup.

As a player, I contributed both team wise and individually, advancing three tournaments to finish in the top 8 at CIF Individual Regionals, and leading the team to a CIF championship even in the absence of our coach.

However, because of her large lack of presence throughout the season, my coach never observed nor acknowledged my achievements as a player, captain, and coach. All season, I worked with the expectation of recognition because I equated praise with success. But, when it was not given, feeling disregarded and confused, I questioned my efforts to improve the team and whether her acknowledgement meant fulfillment and happiness. I realized that external approval is fleeting; the most important is learning my true motivations and character. Being confident in myself knowing that I made a difference in the program was a greater accomplishment and measure of growth than any superficial words of praise could have caused. In fact, I concluded that teaching another teammate and watching them grow on the

court was far more rewarding and impactful. Despite being appreciated or not, I genuinely wanted to continue cheering, leading, and coaching to help incoming players and enhance the program.

And so in my senior year, I stepped back into the gym on the first day of try-outs, listening to the squeaks of shoes and sounds of the rackets. I saw familiar and new faces, some struggling with footwork and others barely hitting the birdie. I set my bag down, laced up my shoes, grabbed a racket out of my bag, and approached an unfamiliar face.