

We didn't, though. Our exhibition at the competition was the best we had performed all year. Sure, I made a couple of mistakes. None of us was perfect. We were proud of what we had done, though, and knew that we would place well in the judging.

Judging hadn't come yet, though, and as we walked off the field we knew that the next few hours would be spent in anticipation, unsure of how well we had really done. We moved up to the bleachers and watched the rest of the bands from behind. They were good, but were they as good as we? We really just didn't know. The suspense killed us, and we were surrounded by other bands who felt the exact same way as us.

The time to announce the scores eventually came, of course, and the bleachers on both sides of the field went dead silent. Sitting in the midst of such a large crowd of band geeks was kind of eerie, because everyone was focused on a single thing: finding out their score and rank. The announcer drew things out as long as he possibly could, but when there was no more time to stall, he started to announce the results of the last-place team.

We hadn't gotten last place. At least we had that much.

The announcer crept up the list, announcing the score and rank of each band. As he approached first place, we became more and more worried. Time ran slower and slower, and seemed to be at a dead stop by the time he reached fifth place.

"In fifth place, and with a score of 91.05," he announced, his voice unable to draw out the words any more, "Manchester Township High School!"

We, as a band, collectively released our held breaths. I almost didn't want to listen anymore. The intensity of the situation was overwhelming.

"In fourth place," he continued, "With a score of 92.7..."

I froze right there. Ninety-two point seven? But my sister had told me, the previous year, that the band broke the school's record with something around a ninety-two. That meant that, no matter what we placed now, we would have broken the school's record.

Still, there was no reason to believe that we had gotten fourth place. Why not hope for better?

"Delran High School!"

Perhaps it wasn't completely appropriate, but at that moment I almost vomited. I certainly hadn't expected to be as nervous as I was at that point. This was a big moment, though, and it meant a lot.

"In third place, with a score of 93.725..." the announcer went on. At that point, I was feeling pretty content--though still completely nervous--because we had already beaten last year's score by almost a full point, at the very least.

"Hightstown High School!"

I released it all at that point. Everything that was stored inside me, everything that had been stored for the entire marching band season, spewed out of me like an uncontrollable geyser. Surrounded by sweaty band geeks, I joined with the deafening cheering that surrounded me.

We had made it. We beat our own record-breaking score, thanks to all of our hard work. In the beginning, we didn't have very much faith. There was no reason to believe that we'd succeed at all, with new band directors and a new school year. Still, we put effort into our work, determined to make it the best it could. That paid off in the end, and if we hadn't believed in ourselves we could not have made it to that one moment in which everything became worth it.