PROMPT #2: 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?

“Christopher!” Master Devdee yelled from across the arena. It was final round to gold. Me and my contender were drenched in sweat and full of bruises – a scene from Karate Kid reimagined – except for when I went for a 45-degree roundhouse kick before being embarrassingly bluffed as I was immediately put down by a guillotine-like kick. “It’s okay, I’ll keep going and win the next one,” I thought to myself and told Master Devdee. In a split second he hit the back of my head, “that kind of thought is exactly the reason you lost.”

I started Taekwondo long before I learned algebra, having competed in junior tournaments when I was eight. Throughout primary school, I participated in countless local tournaments. By middle school, I practiced three times a week and competed in regional competitions. Before I realized, I had passed my black belt examination at the age of 15. Through my journey of passing belt colors, I was trained to always move forward, an unwavering formula to achieve my goals. However, having set the likes of a horse blinder also equates to never looking sideways, let alone backwards.

This forward-thinking mentality of mine was further enforced by the competitive debating I had participated since Grade 9. One of the tactics in debating I learned was to always keep pressure on the opponent and never falter. This always on-the-move stance I have kept to heart has indeed played a critical role on the many successes of my life, be it on earning my black belt, winning a math competition or getting top grades. Yet only after that match in ChunCheon Korea, did I realize how it has also cost me many failures in life – losing an important debate on the semifinals, or biting off more than I can chew for not few of my academic courses.

Losing that final match dealt a big blow to me, not necessarily because of the gold I could have bagged, but rather on having to bring home the fact that my lifelong principle was not robust after all. Building up a habit is challenging, breaking free off of that habit brings the game to a whole new level, let alone when that habit has turned into my mantra – a superhero who lost his secret sauce and lost his way to continue pursue greatness. As they say it, practice makes perfect. My reality, however, speaks of a distinction – practice makes permanent. In a way, I have spent my entire life practicing on pushing forward and charge like a bull. It just happened to be the case that this bull has never slipped on a banana skin, at least not until now.

My train of thought has completely changed. It is now equipped with more advanced sensors capable of looking backwards to not repeat the same mistakes as well as peripherally to analyze for any incomings. Dropping Advanced Physics for Environmental Systems and Societies felt like a personal defeat at first, but it allowed me to take the Economics HL course which has been my passion for some time. It was a smart decision allowing what time constraint I have to optimally learn both Science and Economics materials.

Previously, I have set my career goal to initiate a venture as an aspiring entrepreneur even though my family skepticized it. Now taking a step back, I became aware of their wish for me to continue the family business as they had prepared it for my future in the first place. I realized that disregarding their lifelong effort for me was selfish. Even though my entrepreneurial spirit still runs high with no plans to back down, I will take on the family heirloom as if training for my second blackbelt, only this time with my family supporting me on the sidelines, well-knowing that I will be winning it for them too.

*Hi Christopher!*

*Well done on this piece! I think your incorporation of martial art features throughout the essay really shined through as your powerful imageries immersed readers to your journey from one reflective thought to the next. Wishing you all the best for your application!*

*- Matthew*