**How did high school sports play a role in your involvement in Sultan High School?**

Joining the Sultan High School cheer program was by far the best decision I made going into high school. Cheer has been the foundation for my involvement at SHS. I have not only created friendships, but I have also developed a family. I firmly believe that I would not be the person I am today if it weren't for sports. Cheerleading has pushed me to grow in unimaginable ways. Not only have I had physical growth, but I feel I have gained a different level of emotional intelligence. I've ventured outside of my comfort zone by performing halftime routines at sporting events, engaging with community members at volunteer projects, and attending weight room.

I have a vivid memory of my first time in the after-school weights program as a sophomore. It was horrifying, yet I quickly began to enjoy lifting. I was surrounded by about 30+ teenage boys. All of which lifted very heavily compared to myself, and as the only girl, I often felt defeated and weak in comparison to them. Regardless, I persevered and stuck with it. I continued to show up every day after school, Monday through Thursday, and then go to cheer practice. Come summertime, I chose to go to the first day of weight room at 7:00–9:00 am, knowing I had 3-5 hour cheer practices right after. The moment in which I realized I had found my place in my community and at Sultan High School was on a Friday during the summer when we had “strong man." I remember doing a prowler relay, and Mr. Murphy had put me with the more experienced, stronger group. This meant I was pushing the prowler with double the weight—four plates on it, which weighs roughly 200 pounds total—and it was hard. I wanted to cry and give up. The second time around, I could barely walk. My run started getting slower, and soon enough, I was struggling to even walk. Then, next thing I know, five of my fellow peers are alongside me, helping me push, and soon enough more people joined in, and everyone was cheering me on. This moment is very sentimental to me, as it is what has inspired me to keep going with athletics.

In addition to cheerleading, I have participated in track and field for all four years of my high school career. I have been a captain for both my junior and senior years in both sports, and although track and field is a fantastic sport, I wanted to highlight cheer as it truly is the root of my growth here at Sultan High School.  Having said that, I think sports at Sultan High School have given me the confidence to try new things that I otherwise would not have had the guts to do. Since then, I've encouraged other people to attend school events with me, which has greatly improved the experience.