

Matt

FYC 13100

Professor Clauss

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### A Word to the Wise

**Situation:** As a former student at Biotechnology High School (BTHS) in addition to a two-sport varsity athlete at my home high school, I am writing to the current freshmen at BTHS via the school newspaper *The Biohazard*, urging more students to participate in athletics for their respective home high schools. Most students are hesitant to branch out and play because of the large time constraint on top of their large workloads at BTHS. I hope to show the freshmen the merits associated with playing, despite drawbacks, and convince more students to play for their respective home-town high schools.

Dear BTHS Class of 2014,

How does it feel being part of a school that *Newsweek* magazine ranked as one of America's most elite high schools? I would imagine you feel reasonably stressed since your first set of midterms and finals are swiftly approaching. Believe me, I know the feeling. "WOAH woah woah, who is this guy?" you may ask. Well my name is Matt ---, my favorite color is blue, I love puppies, I believe blueberry pie is the equivalent of heaven for tastebuds, I think spiders are icky, and I don't think I could live without sports. Now that you know pretty much all you could ever know about me, I'll continue with why I am writing. As a member of BTHS' Class of 2010, I graduated before having the pleasure to meet ninety-nine percent of you. Despite this lack of personal contact, however, I feel compelled to pass on any knowledge I have in order to help you in your exploits at BTHS since I have experienced almost everything you will throughout your career at BTHS. Without a doubt you are truly a special and talented group of students and I know you will be successful throughout the rest of your careers at BTHS. With this in mind, I wholeheartedly encourage each and every one of you to participate in athletics for

your respective home high school in order to fulfill your highest potential. I know that many of you will not take my advice because the large majority of students at BTHS do not play sports and I don't expect that to change. I think that this is an issue, although I understand that this route is not for everyone. There are negatives associated with the decision to participate in sports, but the benefits to your productivity, your health, your GPA, and your social life make playing sports a truly wise move for today and tomorrow.

While I urge each of you to participate in high school athletics, by no means am I saying that you need to dedicate all of your time to the task or you need to be a superstar on the team. You don't even have to be a player on the varsity team. The first team you would probably be a part of is the freshman team. Besides the fact that freshman teams rarely cut players, it is a fun and mostly relaxed environment where you can have fun with friends. Even beyond that level, however, junior varsity teams are not something to be ashamed of. For example, Justin Kenney, one of my best friends, didn't play on his varsity soccer for all four years of high school, but he simply loved playing and enjoyed being around his friends during practice so much that he didn't mind playing for the junior varsity team. He didn't dedicate his life to the team, but he was still able to enjoy himself and I doubt he regretted the path he chose.

Regardless of the level sport you play on, it may seem like an impossible task to juggle the enormous workload at BTHS and play sports at the same time. I want to assure you that it definitely is possible. Interestingly enough, Ally Alphonso, my class's valedictorian, played sports in high school. In fact, she was a three-sport varsity athlete who eventually accepted an athletic scholarship to Boston University for field hockey. While Ally was one of the most talented individuals I have ever met in my life and don't think that many people can handle what she could, it is indeed possible to balance sports and school and still be successful. I, for a more

reasonable example, was a varsity athlete on the soccer and lacrosse teams at Red Bank Regional High School. While I was by no means the valedictorian of my class, I was still able to maintain a relatively high GPA of 94 throughout high school.

Don't get me wrong, though, playing sports was very difficult. Here was a typical day in the middle of soccer season: wake up at 5:45 AM to catch a 6:15 bus, ride the bus for an hour, attend classes till dismissal at 2:15 PM, show up late to practice because of the bus, practice until 5:30 or 6:00, go home and eat/shower/unwind until about 8:00, work on homework for three or more hours (depending on that specific night's workload), then sleep. Lather, rinse, repeat for a few months per sports season. Needless to say, this was quite a demanding schedule and I know some people who wouldn't want to deal the constant activity. Personally I didn't mind it. I enjoy being active, so while I was busy I was doing what I loved which made it much more bearable.

While my daily schedule was constantly busy in-season, it's interesting to note, however, that when I was out of season I felt I wasn't any better with my schedule and often finished homework later than when I was in season. There may be a reason for this phenomenon. John Briley of the *Washington Post* reported a six-week University of Bristol study that determined that employees who exercised during their lunch breaks had "productivity gains that averaged 15 percent." While fifteen percent doesn't seem like much, the study claims employees were able to make up for the time exercising with a few minutes to spare. True, the study is about employees at a company, but the productivity gains can extend to students who exercise daily. I personally felt physically tired after practices and games, but I was able to focus more intently on my work and finish at a more reasonable pace than if I just went home and worked.

If finishing work at the same or slightly better rate as a result of exercising doesn't phase you, then maybe the other benefits of exercising can help convince you to play sports for your home high school. Exercising can help you maintain a healthier lifestyle, improve your mood, and fight stress. Physically, exercise helps maintain a healthier lifestyle through improved cardiovascular ability and stronger muscles, but it also helps in other discrete ways. In the *Washington Post* article, Briley cites figures from Mark Occhipinti, president of the organization American Fitness Professionals Associates. Mark contended that "employees took 13 percent fewer sick days" and "rates of employee down time and suicide dropped" for the corporate giant Johnson & Johnson after the company installed fitness facilities on their campuses and created organized exercise programs for employees. Workers were sick less often and were living healthier lifestyles than those who didn't exercise at other companies. Besides physical benefits, exercise has the psychological benefits of improving your mood and fighting stress. Nanci Hellmich of *USA Today* reported a University of Vermont study that claims "people are in a better mood for up to twelve hours after they work out" than individuals who don't exercise over the same time period. Thus, after exercising you feel better than if you didn't exercise. I know personally that if I am upset about something then I am far less productive and I produce more mediocre work than if I am in a good mood. Playing sports kept me in a good mood and allowed me to finish my work at a good pace.

If I told you there was a way to finish work at a better rate, be in a good mood for an extended period of time, and keep your body healthy, I'm willing to bet you'd at least be interested in the idea. What if I told you this method could help boost your GPA as well? I know you are only freshmen at this present time, but knowing how focused students at BTHS are to accomplish the ultimate goal of acceptance to a top-tier academic institution, having the

highest GPA possible is of utmost importance. This is where sports can help. Tara Parker-Pope of the *New York Times* described a Saginaw State University in Michigan study whereby college students who “exercised vigorously seven days a week had GPA’s [on a 4.0 scale] that were, on average, 0.4 points higher than those who didn’t exercise.” Additionally, “students with GPA’s of 3.5 or higher were three times more likely to participate in vigorous physical activity than students with a GPA under 3.0.” The 0.4 point difference could be the distinction between a B+ student and an A student. Seeing as your high school GPA is one of the main factors colleges look at in your application, every point counts. The 0.4 points in your GPA that can come from playing sports could be the difference between acceptance or rejection to an Ivy League-caliber school. Not to be misleading, however, playing sports by no means guarantees a boost to anyone’s GPA or acceptance to an Ivy League school. Personally, I did not get into any of the Ivy League schools (although I was waitlisted at the University of Pennsylvania.)

Despite not making the cut for the Ivy League schools, there is no doubt in my mind that sports did help me gain acceptance into institutions such as the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the University of Virginia, and the University of Notre Dame, where I am currently a Biology major. I attribute sports to not only the possible boost to my GPA but also for demonstrating intangible measures of my personality such as leadership and teamwork that a GPA cannot show. Leadership in general is often something that is hard to describe or quantify, but once instance during my soccer season helped demonstrate my leadership. My team was very young. Including myself, only four seniors started on the varsity team for RBR. As a senior, I felt the need to step up and take on responsibility as a team leader. After starting out the season 0-4, I knew something had to be done. During the last game of that dreadful streak it was completely my fault that we lost. In double overtime I missed a ball that allowed the opposing

team to score and win the game. I made a vow to myself that I wouldn't ever let that happen again. I set out working as hard as I could to get better, starting with a five-mile sprint to let out my personal frustration directly after that appalling game. While I didn't tell anyone about it, my coach saw me running. The following day everyone on the team knew of what I had done and I believe it was a turning point in the season for all of us. We went 3-2-1 in our next six games on our schedule. I didn't need to talk: my teammates followed from my example. Besides leadership, sports obviously show teamwork. A team cannot be successful without working together. Despite differing personalities, I learned to tolerate everyone and bring out the best play in everyone. Like the saying goes, there's no "I" in "team."

In both leadership and teamwork on a sports team you have to be engaged with your teammates. Thus, sports at your home high school can help you broaden your social horizons away from BTHS and meet new people. Don't get me wrong, BTHS has an extremely tight-knit community as a result of having only roughly eighty students per class. For instance, I knew the name of every single person in my class within the first half of the year or so of my freshman year. Many of you probably know everyone in your class by now as well. Without a doubt I appreciated the closeness of the student body while I attended BTHS, but it is good to see different faces every once in a while. Being with the same sixty-three kids all four years of high school made me enjoy others' company. For example, some of my closest friendships in high school developed as a result of playing on my lacrosse and soccer teams. It was good to branch out and expand my horizons beyond the largely homogenous environment of BTHS.

Overall, are sports for everyone? Absolutely not. That being said, if this letter can convince that one individual who is on the fence about playing sports to go and try out for a team he or she wants then I will be happy. If this letter does nothing, then at least I know I gave it my

best shot. Obviously I am biased as a soccer and lacrosse player, but I believe that everyone can benefit from all the good things that sports can do for the body and the mind. Regardless of skillset, sports can help a student at BTHS to be more productive, have a healthier body, keep a sound mind, be in a better mood, achieve a higher GPA, (hopefully) get accepted to the school of his or her choice, improve his or her leadership and teamwork skills, and expand his or her horizons beyond the small community at BTHS. Playing sports for my home high school was one of the best decisions I have ever made and I wouldn't give up those experiences for anything. I know those of you who decide to play won't regret it either. So get up, get out, and go play.

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