

Valdez is known for a few things: snow, the pipeline, and basketball. Athletics in general are huge in my town, but basketball reigns supreme. So, like most kids, I was thrown into our community's "Little-Dribblers" program in the first grade and haven't put down a ball since. Most of the payoffs from this sport include state titles and medals, but further into basketball the payoffs included lessons like diligence and teamwork. However, basketball did more by giving me a unique perspective when it came to leadership.

I have been in leadership roles my whole life. From student government to team captain, I have held about every position there is to offer. In high school, I was given a special opportunity to be a leader for those much younger than me, rather than my peers. My previous head coach also coached our city's middle school program, and invited me to be the assistant coach. I was beyond flattered and excited to be able to take on this role, and accepted her offer within two seconds of receiving it. I loved every moment with those girls. Watching them grow the same passion I did when I was their age was mesmerizing. Being able to aide and inspire them in the sport, as well as help them obtain their goals felt even better than playing in a state championship game.

About three weeks into the middle school season, I had a group of girls attack me with questions of high school ball, summer leagues, and my personal awards. After giggling through the answers and a not-so-competitive game of "Bump", one of the girls looked up at me and told me she wanted to be just like me when she was older. Other girls in the circle followed with echos of "me too", and I had never been so humbled. I went home that night smiling from ear to ear; I couldn't believe that I had made that big of an impact on those girls. I stayed up all night thinking about my role models growing up.

Living in a small town, I have unfortunately seen quite a bit of teen drug and alcohol abuse. In middle school I saw phenomenal girls on our high school team, that I looked up to very much, continually violate TAD policy and immerse themselves in illegal activities. Luckily, even as a kid, I knew that regardless of how athletically gifted those girls were, I couldn't strive to be like them. I had lost faith in all the role models I had. The young girls who approached me at practice, claiming they wanted to be like me, made me realize I could change that for them.

I realized right then that I needed to be the role model I never got to have when I was their age. Although I was already a pretty driven student, I made sure to push my goals even higher and work even harder. I buried myself in school work, always making sure I did my best. I worked all the way up to the top spot in my class. I made sure I was a well versed student. I joined all the clubs my school had to offer like internship programs, student government, and the National Honor Society. I made sure I maintained good relationships with my teachers and the adults in our community. On the court, I always showed good sportsmanship, high leadership, and a stellar attitude, because I knew my girls would be watching in the stands. Most importantly, I made sure all of those girls knew what I did, why I did it, and why they were a good things to exemplify.

Anytime a questionable offer came up or my character had the chance to falter, I would think about those girls and if I would want them to do what I was considering. If the answer was no, I wouldn't take up the offer. I couldn't risk letting those girls down. I firmly believe that they are the reason I excelled as much as I did throughout high school. They gave me a reason to say no, work hard, and be the best person I could be. That was a pivotal moment in my life, and I

don't think I'll ever forget it. Lastly, I have a few girls I need to thank when they're older, for shaping me into the kind of person I am today.

Word Count: 738 words.

\*My high school attaches our ACT scores to our transcript. They are located in the bottom, right-hand corner. It lists my highest score in each individual category, as well as my highest composite score. My resume with my student involvement is also attached to the back.