

Since I was a child, I've grappled with the challenge of fitting in. All throughout my childhood I've jumped from activity to activity, searching for the one that resonated with me. Every few years it seemed like I would change sports; I wasn't lithe enough for gymnastics, nor fast enough for soccer or co-ed basketball. Each time, I felt disconnected from both the sport and its community.

Upon starting high school, I was determined to find that community. As I had been swimming my whole life, though never in a competitive capacity, I joined the swim team. On the team, I met people who would become some of my closest friends. They persuaded me to try out for the water polo team the following year. So that summer I joined a water polo club to learn how to play the sport. During the first week of practice I lagged in every skill and drill. Compared to other players who had been playing water polo for years, I was a fish out of water— only I was in water. And even though I was leagues behind everyone else, I loved every minute of it. Water polo was the first activity that simply clicked. The only problem was that I was terrible at it!

Every weekend we would participate in tournaments. This was the perfect opportunity for us to apply the techniques and skills we practiced each week. However, while other players got to participate, my coach kept me benched, not believing that I was ready for a real game. Watching from the sidelines was torturous. I used my time on the bench to analyze every move and pass. These moments greatly advanced my understanding of water polo and improved my game. During practice I would apply what I learned. I would show up early to games to ask my coaches questions and discuss strategy. At home I set up my own workout regiment in an attempt to improve my physical conditioning. As the summer progressed, I received more and more opportunities to play. That fall, I tried out for my high school's water polo team. My hard work during the summer earned me my dream position: starting center. The confidence and experience I had gained helped me connect with newer players. I knew how chaotic water polo could be for a beginner, because I had been in their place just a couple months earlier. Though I was not the team captain, my team regarded me as a leader.

Throughout my high school career I have had to work twice as hard as my peers. I have borderline ADHD, the distractible type, and dysgraphia, which makes taking timed assessments difficult. I signed up for Algebra II Honors in my Freshman year. Within the first week I realized that my private school curricula had not included Algebra I. After talking to my parents, we felt it imperative for me to make up this learning gap and still do well in this class. I knew that the coming years would only be tougher, and knowing that I can work hard and be successful, future challenges would be less daunting. I finished my first semester with an A and my second with a B+, and will be completing high school with six AP and four honors classes.

Just as with Algebra II, I applied myself to learning water polo and succeeded in it. At the end-of-season water polo banquet, as we celebrated an undefeated season, I received the team MVP award. I have learned that *grit and perseverance* drive me to pursue my passions and achieve my goals. Thanks to these experiences, I am confident and optimistic about my future.