

Knowledge is Power

In today's society, teenagers are faced with many challenges. Some of these issues are obvious regardless of one's social-economic status, such as: drugs, cyber-bullying, human trafficking and police brutality. Others are silent and often go unnoticed. As a young male athlete, I believe a great threat to our community is students not being able to obtain equal access to education. In my opinion, there are injustices within the educational system faced by high school students with learning disabilities, as well as student athletes who suffer a major injury.

The educational system's injustices can stifle students with special needs abilities to excel academically. Unfortunately, this problem is rising which may negatively impact teenagers' ability to become contributing citizens within our community.

Unfortunately, some of the educational system's educators don't assist students that struggle with learning disabilities, even when there are Individualized Educational Programs (IEPs) available. I realized this several years ago when I witnessed my brother's experiences. My older brother is autistic so he learns and comprehends information differently. Some instructors were apprehensive about changing their teaching style and were not willing to help my brother learn, no matter how much effort he put into his work. Luckily our parents did everything within their power to ensure my brother's IEP was executed to help him excel academically. In addition, these actions helped change the perspective of the teachers about his learning capabilities and academic potential. This experience helped me to identify a solution to mitigate this problem. That is, the educational system should require teachers to adapt to the student's learning abilities and not the instructor's teaching style and preference. Adopting this method would ensure that students with learning disabilities receive an equitable education.

Another issue related to the educational system occurs with student athletes. In 2016, my left knee was injured during a football game and I suffered a torn Anterior Cruciate Ligament (ACL). Suddenly, I had to face the fear and uncertainty of surgery and rehabilitation. Despite this setback, I learned a valuable life lesson: to achieve my goals, I must stay focused, even when unexpected events occur.

So, to overcome this obstacle, I developed a plan that would help me achieve my academic and athletic goals. My recovery was slated to last several months. During this time, I completed all my coursework on time by proactively communicating with my teachers and classmates to enlist their assistance. Essentially, I revised my schedule so I could obtain homework assignments and make inquiries on a weekly basis, before and after school. This approach helped me keep up to date with my classes while I recovered. My goal was to achieve the honor roll, regardless of the circumstances. In fact, my hard work and dedication paid off and I earned a G.P.A. of 3.81, my highest during any high school semester.

Next, I planned to obtain medical clearance to return to the lineup and my previous athletic activities. Typically, athletes recover from ACL surgery between nine to twelve months. Fortunately, my surgeon cleared me one month ahead of schedule. While recovering, I continued to support my teammates and coaches from the sidelines. I attended every practice and game and offered assistance to my teammates throughout the season. These actions were well received and I believe played a small part in helping to motivate our football team to work as a unified force. Spotting my work ethic during recovery, my football coaches allowed me to facilitate a new core, upper body and light leg workout routine, to engage my teammates and fellow athletes after school. In addition, I collaborated with the coaches and other seniors to devise a workout and exercise routine that could be implemented during the upcoming football

season. To my surprise, I was named captain of the varsity football team, a true honor. This season was also special because our football team won the Western Reserve Conference and qualified for the Regional Semifinal Play-offs. This experience has taught me the importance of establishing and supporting quality relationships with my teammates and coaches, on and off the field.

However, in many cases, the educational system doesn't always provide help to a student with serious physical injuries. I realized this when a close friend and football teammate shattered his ankle and fibula. Ultimately, he needed surgery, hospitalization and was required to stay at home several weeks for recovery. Nevertheless, the system didn't support him continuing his education which negatively impacted his grades and his ability to play sports. Consequently, his options were limited and now he must attend a junior college instead of going to his preferred university. This experience made me realize that a possible solution for this problem is to provide customized educational plans for all students who suffer an injury and are absent from school due to surgery. Developing customized educational plans will assign ownership to teachers. This approach will ensure that these students will stay on task and not fall behind or need an extra year of high school.

In conclusion, I believe establishing an equitable educational system is a great step towards reducing this problem within our community. The issues linked with injustices are tied together with the educational system. Therefore, it is imperative that educators adapt their teaching styles to proactively connect with students. Especially, in situations when students have learning disabilities or when they are faced with challenges which prohibit them to receive in class instruction. Knowledge is power and education is the key for success to make a difference in our community and our world.