

Brown, Achievement: Martial arts competition

A faint twinge of excitement floated through my body that night. A hint of anticipation of the coming day could not be suppressed; yet to be overcome with anxiety would not do at all. I arduously forced those pernicious thoughts from seeping in and overcoming my body and mind. I still wonder that I slept at all that night.

But I did. I slept soundly and comfortably as those nervous deliberations crept into my defenseless, unsuspecting mind, pilfering my calm composure. When I awoke refreshed, I found my mind swarming with jumbled exhilaration. The adrenaline was flowing already. After a quick breakfast, I pulled some of my gear together and headed out. The car ride of two hours seemed only a few moments as I struggled to reinstate order in my chaotic consciousness and focus my mind on the day before me. My thoughts drifted to the indistinct shadows of my memory.

My opponent's name was John Doe. There were other competitors at the tournament, but they had never posed any threat to my title. For as long as I had competed in this tournament, I had easily taken the black belt championship in my division. John, however, was the most phenomenal martial artist I had ever had the honor of witnessing at my young age of thirteen. And he was in my division. Although he was the same rank, age, size, and weight as I, he surpassed me in almost every aspect of our training. His feet were lightning, and his hands were virtually invisible in their agile swiftness. He wielded the power of a bear while appearing no larger than I. His form and techniques were executed with near perfection. Although I had never defeated his flawlessness before, victory did not seem unattainable. For even though he was extraordinary, he was not much more talented than I. I am not saying that he was not skilled or even that he was not more skilled than I, for he most certainly was, but just not much more than I. I still had one hope, however little, of vanquishing this incredible adversary, for John had one weakness: he was lazy. He didn't enjoy practicing long hours or working hard. He didn't have to. Nevertheless, I had found my passage to triumph.

My mind raced even farther back to all my other failures. I must admit that my record was not very impressive. Never before had I completed anything. I played soccer. I quit. I was a Cub Scout. I quit. I played trumpet. I quit. Karate was all I

had left. The championship meant so much because I had never persevered with anything else.

In the last months, I had trained with unearthly stamina and determination. I had focused all my energies into practicing for this sole aspiration. Every day of the week I trained. Every evening, I

could be found kicking, blocking, and punching at an imaginary opponent in my room. Hours of constant drilling had improved my techniques and speed. All my techniques were ingrained to the point where they were instinctive. Days and weeks passed too swiftly. . . .

I was abruptly jolted back into the present. The car was pulling into the parking lot. The tournament had too quickly arrived, and I still did not feel prepared for the trial which I was to confront. I stepped out of the car into the bright morning sun, and with my equipment bag in hand, walked into the towering building.

The day was a blur. After warming up and stretching, I sat down on the cold wooden floor, closed my eyes, and focused. I cleared my mind of every thought, every worry, and every insecurity. When I opened my eyes, every sense and nerve had become sharp and attentive, every motion finely tuned and deliberate.

The preliminary rounds were quiet and painless, and the championship fight was suddenly before me. I could see that John looked as calm and as confident as ever. Adrenaline raced through my body as I stepped into the ring. We bowed to each other and to the instructor, and the match began.

I apologize, but I do not recall most of the fight. I do faintly remember that when time ran out the score was tied, and we were forced to go into Sudden Death: whoever scored the next point would win. That, however, I do recall.

I was tired. The grueling two points that I had won already had not been enough. I needed one more before I could taste triumph. I was determined to win, though I had little energy remaining. John appeared unfazed, but I couldn't allow him to discourage me. I focused my entire being, my entire consciousness, on overcoming this invincible nemesis. I charged. All my strenuous training, every molecule in my body, every last drop of desire was directed, concentrated on that single purpose as I exploded through his defenses and drove a solitary fist to its mark.

I was not aware that I would never fight John again, but I would not have cared. Never before had I held this prize in my hands, but through pure, salty sweat and vicious determination, the achievement that I had desired so dearly and which meant so much to me was mine at last. This was the first time that I had ever really made a notable accomplishment in anything. This one experience, this one instant, changed me forever. That day I found self-confidence and discovered that perseverance yields its own sweet fruit. That day a sense of invincibility permeated the air. Mountains were nothing. The sun wasn't so bright and brilliant anymore. For a moment, I was the best.

Comments:

The admissions officers admired this essay for its passion and sincerity. In fact, most of the noted drawbacks were based on the writer being too passionate. "Kind of a tempest in a teapot, don't you think?" wrote one. Other suggestions for improvement were "purely editorial" such as the overuse of adjectives and adverbs, using a passive voice, and making contradictory statements. "For example, he says, 'I slept soundly and comfortably as those nervous deliberations crept into

my defenseless, unsuspecting mind, pilfering my calm composure.' How could he sleep soundly and comfortably if the nervous deliberations were pilfering his calm composure? There are a few other examples like that that I won't go into here. I would just suggest that the author look carefully to be sure his ideas stay consistent and support one another."

What I like about this essay from the point of view of an admission officer is that I am convinced that the change in attitude described by the author is real. I do believe that he will carry with him forever the hard-won knowledge that he can attain his goals, that perseverance and hard work will eventually allow him to succeed in any endeavor. This is an important quality to bring to the college experience. Especially when considering applications to prestigious institutions, the admission committee will want to feel sure that the applicants understand the need for hard work and perseverance. Many times the strongest-looking applicants are students for whom academic success has come so easily that the challenges of college come as a shock. I always like hearing stories like this, of students who know what it means to struggle and finally succeed.