

## THE EFFECT YOUTH SPORTS HAD ON MY LIFE

This last year at Nessacus is more than just going into high school. It is letting go of my youth sports career. I have been playing Dalton Youth sports since I was 4 years old, but until now I never realized how big of an effect the teams and coaches had on my childhood.

When I began playing soccer at the age of 4, I didn't think much of it. Most of my thoughts were centered on the clearly visible playground and how fun it looked. But it taught me basic sports manners, like not to kick, scratch, push, or bite; though I still may occasionally do that. It also taught me how to be more social. I didn't realize it then, but some of the kids I was playing with then, turned out to be my best friends now. At that age I was young and energetic. Never did I stop to think about the life skills I was learning, or how in 10 years I would miss those games so much.

As I got older, games and practices became a little more serious. The practices got tougher but this taught me so much. Hard practices taught me how to work on my skills. Many of the drills I did then, I still do today, which shows how important they were and still are. Even though practices were serious, I still managed to goof off with my teammates. During these practices I made friends that I still have today. I love that we can always look back at team photos and memories and laugh at how silly we were.

Once I got into 7<sup>th</sup> grade it became more serious. The soccer field was bigger and I was on a team with 8<sup>th</sup> graders. I know now as an 8<sup>th</sup> grader how important this season is because it's the last one. Practices were very serious, filled with sweat and running. My skills were expected to be at a high school level. My 7<sup>th</sup> grade sports season developed a work ethic for me and taught me how to play "big girl" sports. It taught me how to work through sweat, blood and

pain. But as always, I still had fun. I loved 8<sup>th</sup> graders' goofy personalities and my team. That basketball season I broke my ankle in the championship game. I desperately wanted to go back in, but instead I went to the hospital. This was hard on me because I had to sit it out, but it taught me how to wait and recover.

My 8<sup>th</sup> grade season has been the hardest one. Playing in my last home Dalton Tournament was hard. I felt pressure because I knew there was not another chance to win. It broke my heart to lose the Dalton Soccer Tournament which my team had won 4 years straight. But with this loss I learned how to face defeat. I also learned how to cope with disappointments and come back stronger. My 8<sup>th</sup> grade season also made me enjoy every practice and game more because I knew that it would all be different in high school. It was a great last year and I'm dreading when it ends.

During all my years of playing sports in Dalton I had many different coaches. These coaches all taught me something different and affected my life in one way or another. These coaches taught me how to keep my cool when there's a horrible referee, handle mean players on the field or court respectfully, and how to do many different skills and work at them until they were perfect. But they also taught me life lessons. A bad referee could be a bad co-worker when I'm older. And a mean player could be a mean person that you have to deal with. And learning these skills taught me how to listen and learn in life and how to work until something is my best. All the things my coaches lectured me on were about more than sports; they were about how to treat people in life and how to live in the real world.

Playing youth sports affected my childhood and life so much and I never even realized it till this year. I made best friends that I can't live without today. I learned skills for everyday

life. And most importantly I learned how to be a part of a team and work with other people. I will never again experience anything like those years, and I am so thankful for them.