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Essay Topic: The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?

99th Percentile

"You're approaching clinical obesity." With little time to process the words, my doctor presented me with a graph that showed how I compared to other kids in terms of height and weight. I felt my palms get sweaty as his finger traced the graph, searching for my measurement. Then, his finger stopped at a dot placed at the very top of the chart: Joseph Hong, 99th percentile in both height and weight. Using this measurement as evidence, my doctor proceeded to explicitly warn me of the consequences that may lay ahead if I didn't start losing weight.

Afterward, at home, I went to the bathroom and immediately took my shirt off to see the severity of my physical state. In that mirror, I saw someone I hated. There were stretch marks, folds, and many other features signifying a lazy, unhealthy lifestyle. These features started to drain my confidence, bright personality, and spirit away. However, instead of putting in the work and improving my problem with weight, I opted to seek excuses. As the excuses increased, so did my weight, and I started to become comfortable with this lifestyle. After a few years of stacking excuses and pounds, I stepped into my basketball coach's office after experiencing a season-ending injury. I was expecting him to say how hard it must be for me and how sorry he is for me to not be able to continue the season, but instead, he said, "Life isn't defined by what happens to you. It's how you react to things that happen to you." As my coach told me these words, I had an epiphany. My self-induced weight problem wasn't because of what happened to me, but because of how I reacted to my situations. Genetics, slow metabolism, not being motivated weren't responsible for my problems. I, myself, was the only one responsible for my current situation. Instead of making excuses, I started taking initiative.

In the summer of my freshman year, I contacted my older brother James who had developed himself to become a much more fit, active, and disciplined person than me. However, back in middle school, he also had poor lifestyle habits and was overweight. Inspired by his dramatic transformation, I reached out to him for help. He didn't hesitate to send me workout advice and diet tips. He periodically shared quality advice and encouragement, but the first few weeks were still brutal. I doubted if I could achieve a similar transformation someday. The thought of being clinically deemed obese and continuing to face the consequences of a poor lifestyle motivated me to keep going. With persistent work and my brother's constant cheering, a 6-minute half-mile run became a 6-minute full-mile run, 135 lbs on the bench press became 335 lbs, and soda became green tea. Slowly but surely, my confidence, bright personality, and spirit started to come back along with my health.

2 years later, I was back in the doctor's office, waiting for my physical assessments. Although I had seen drastic changes in my body through the mirror, I had the same nerves as I did 2 years ago. I thought back to all the late nights and early mornings I spent putting my body through pain that can only be persisted through grit. After what felt like an eternity, my doctor came back with my assessment with a grin on his face. Every measurement had a dot labeled with my name, Joseph Hong, and this time I was proud to see that I was healthy with absolutely no irregularities. Through my fitness journey and my newly acquired mindset on taking initiative, I've realized that taking initiative influences many other aspects of life apart from fitness. I started procrastinating less on assignments and studying harder for tests. Instead of wishing to become a better basketball player or leader, I worked to become a better basketball player and leader. I once was filled with excuses, but now I'm filled with ambition and ready to become a better person today than yesterday. However, even after achieving my transformation, I wasn't satisfied. I wanted to help others the same way my brother has done for me.

Today, I am now the founder and president of the lifting club at my high school, and I have enjoyed sharing my lessons with 37 regular members after class hours as the president beyond a varsity basketball athlete. Through this learning and sharing, I

was pleasantly surprised to find I wasn't only capable of becoming athletic, strong, and agile but also capable of inspiring and leading those around me.