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That Round Piece of Rubber

On a Saturday morning I woke up at six in the morning so my father could drive me to the hockey rink so I could fulfill a dream of mine: playing hockey. I had not ice skated in years and never played hockey in my life, but I was determined to play on this day.

As soon as we walked in the rink we saw players warming up, taking slap shots and performing very difficult skating techniques. My dad immediately said, “These guys don’t look like beginners; they look like they can skate pretty well.” When I signed up I thought I was going to be playing with beginners, but I was wrong. I signed up on the Saturday which is for more experienced players as opposed to the beginner day: Thursday.

I found the locker room and paid my ten dollars required to play. I didn’t own a single piece of hockey gear. I asked the person in charge if there was any gear around I could use. He replied, “Sure, what do you need?” I replied, “Everything.” He looked at me strangely, as did the others in the locker room. We went to the storage room and he found a bag I could use with someone else’s old sweaty gear. Not knowing if anything would fit me or if everything I needed was in the bag he handed it to me. He left me on my own to figure everything out. At this point I felt he thought I wasn’t going to get out on the ice.

I was determined to play. I had never put on a set of hockey gear before, but ten minutes later I was fully geared up with a helmet too big for my head and ice skates three times my size. I was the last one in the locker room so I didn't see how everyone else got on the bench. Instead of using the door on the side of the rink that everyone else used I climbed over the side of the bench using it as my own jungle gym. I could tell by the look on the other players faces they were thinking to themselves "What the fuck?"

I finally got on the bench and awkwardly introduced myself to the other players. Somehow, I didn't realize it, but I was still missing one thing: gloves. I couldn't believe I had forgotten the gloves in the bag. Luckily a gentleman named Chuck handed me an extra pair he had with him. A few minutes later I hear "You're on!" I watched enough hockey to know that it was my turn to get on the ice. My first shift ever wasn't too bad—I only fell twice. I fell plenty more times that morning, but somehow I scored my first goal in my first ever game.

As I was coming down the center of the ice, another player who had the puck was coming down the left wing. We entered the offensive zone and almost immediately he passed it to me. Slap! I took a slap shot right at the goalie low blocker side. To my surprise and the surprise of every other player in the rink, it went in. I scored a goal! Many of the other players started to cheer, but for some reason I didn't. I acted like I had been there before showing no emotion except for a little fist bump.

The game ended and we all skated in a line to say good game. Players were telling me "Nice shot!" or "Keep it up." We returned to the locker room and to my surprise Chuck had kept the puck I got my first goal with and gave it to me so I could

keep it as an accolade. In my hand I now had a round, six ounce, one inch thick, three inch wide, piece of rubber. It doesn't look like much or smell like much, but it means a lot. Everytime I look at it I will remember that morning and the determination and courage I showed. I knew I would fall, I knew I wouldn't be the best, and I knew people would look at me strangely. Nevertheless, I was determined enough and had enough courage despite these challenges to go out on the ice and play. Something that stuck with me that morning is after my father and I got in the car he told me that he wouldn't have done what I had.

That morning was the end of a middle school dream I had. It was also the beginning of a new journey in my life. I play hockey as much as I can now and take lessons every week. It also helped me define myself. I realized how much I can do when I set my eyes on something and go for it. I never thought of myself as a person with a lot of courage, but after that morning I can see why someone would say that about me. That morning helped to show me that I can learn many things about my character just by the experiences I go through. Now everytime I look at "that round piece of rubber" I think of that.