

My muscles are spasming uncontrollably, it feels like a needle stabbed into my side, I'm suffocating, as if I'm a fish desperately flopping around. I've failed to read my opponent. As I step in for the clinch, he brings a sharp crescent kick over my shoulders and nails me in the side of the head. Three points. He pushes his hips out, catching me with a tight roundhouse. Two points. With a five-point deficit in the final seconds of the match, my body wanted to give in, my brain is telling me it's impossible, but my heart says otherwise. He comes in again with a skipping roundhouse to secure the win. I panic; my mind goes blank, but my body reacts. Through repeated training, my muscle memory kicks in, and I land a spinning hook kick to the head. The timer buzzes.

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Perseverance isn't easy, but with it, you get things done; you push through brutal training every day to enjoy a couple of glorious seconds on the mat. Taekwondo isn't the only place where perseverance matters. The tenets of Taekwondo aren't just painted on a wall, they are a way of life. They can be applied everywhere. The definition of perseverance is continuing to pursue a course of action despite challenges, resistance or discouragement. I believe that I have fully understood this tenet and used it to guide my life thus far, which is why I feel that I should get recognized for my dedication and commitment to Taekwondo and beyond.

When I first started Taekwondo, I wasn't looking for competition, I was disappointed in the idea of competition from my past. As a child, I loved to swim, but when it got competitive, all the fun in it evaporated, and horrendous practices ensued. But Taekwondo was different; I wanted, and still want, to be the absolute best. And instead of dreaming, I decided to put in the work. No one likes hard training, but it was the only way to get better. Soon, people in my dojang started worshipping me on the mat, and that's when I knew I had to look beyond my comfort zone to find opponents that could help me improve. For the first time, I craved competition. My master took me to my first championship, the Illinois state championship, late April, where I was surrounded by seniors who had all trained for far longer than I, even those younger than me had more experience. It was like stepping into an amusement park and seeing all the scary rides, breathtaking, for better or for worse. My legs were shaking, I stuttered with every sentence, and my vision was unfocused. Right before my fight, I managed to pull myself back together and step onto the mat with a fake air of confidence. It didn't last. The moment my opponent slid into me, reality slapped me in the face, or rather kicked me in the face, my first conscious thought since walking into the convention was, *I'm going to lose*. In that moment, I had a breakthrough, Perseverance is useless if we don't reap its profits. So I trusted in my training up to that point, and I fought my best, and I came out on top, almost miraculously. For the poomsae, I was feeling a bit better, with my first gold medal in sparring, I was ready to dominate, but too much confidence can prove fatal as well. Practice did pay off; I did win another gold medal, but I learned my lesson along the way. I won by 0.02 points.

Perseverance is also prevalent in my academic career. I grinded the American Mathematics Competition since eighth grade, achieving a perfect score of 25 on the grade 8 test and honor roll on the grade 10 test. With my score of 133.5 on the AMC 10b, I also qualified for the American Invitational Mathematics Exam, a significant achievement to many. People at school often said I had true talent for math, and some have said they wish they could be like me,

but I often firmly reject such praise, not that I'm humble, but because I have no talent-I got where I am today through practice, day by day, and others can do the same too, I believe. Balancing school life and Taekwondo is a challenge, but it can be done. By using the tenets of Taekwondo to get me through daily life, I can stay focused during school and conserve energy for Taekwondo. At school, I have all As in my normal classes. And after school, being a math student, I participated in the ICTM, a state math competition, as a representative from my school. During the regional competition, my team messed up, we got second place instead of the predicted first. And because of that, our school ended up getting second overall instead of being at the top of the subdivision. Perseverance isn't just about training; it's also about bouncing back from mistakes and learning from them, and during the state finals, we ran the test perfectly, securing top five within the entire state of Illinois.

Before applying it myself, I always thought that perseverance was some billionaire motivation video advice, but I've found that it can help us improve our day-to-day lives, inside and outside the dojang. In the future, I hope to be the best, not just in Taekwondo, but in everything I do. I want to be an Olympian, I want to go to MIT, and through these tenets, I'm trying to achieve these goals, to make my dreams come true, one step at a time. With this scholarship, I can do more than I was able to before; I can buy better training gear, I can get a punching bag for myself, I can invest it into clubs, and also use it to obtain tools that can help me better enhance my academic journey.