

Why College is Important to Me

by Benjamin Tso

As I held the envelope in my hands, I suspected what was inside. A letter from the United States Tennis Association (USTA) could only mean one thing. My heartbeat quickened as I tore open the seal. I grabbed the letter and read with hungry eyes. The letter began:

“Dear Benjamin Tso,

The junior development office of the United States Tennis Association is pleased to offer you a full scholarship to the high-performance academy in Boca Raton, Florida.”

I now faced an impossible decision. Having just won the boy’s 14 and Under National Championships in San Antonio, I was ranked number 2 in the country. Enrolling in the internationally-acclaimed academy would elevate my skills to their full potential, pushing me toward the professional circuit. However, the academy could only provide a few hours of daily online courses, sacrificing my education in the process.

I was fourteen when I got that letter. It forced me to establish my goals and evaluate my future. While I showed promise as a young athlete, I was also adamant about my studies. My parents, both immigrants from China, had raised me to embrace the importance of education. Coming to America with nothing more than the clothes on their backs, they worked assiduously to learn a new language and excel academically. Despite their lives of poverty, they emerged as stellar students, graduating as the Valedictorians of their respective high school classes, earning college degrees from top universities, and attending medical school. I pictured my parents as I thought about my decision. I imagined my life without a proper education. As the son of two model students, I realized that my true potential lied in my academic capabilities. Although my dream of being a professional athlete was within reach, the sacrifice was too significant. I respectfully declined the USTA scholarship.

At that decisive moment in my life, I revolutionized my goals. While I did continue to play tennis at a high level, my greatest passion and priority became my education. Like my parents, I wanted to pursue a career as a doctor. What better way to utilize my strengths than to help those in need? Instead of dreaming of the US Open, I envisioned myself in scrubs with a stethoscope around my neck. College became the next step in my path.

With this newfound mentality, I excelled in the classroom and on the tennis court. I maintained a 4.0 unweighted GPA and received a 2400 on the SATs. Meanwhile, I earned the number one ranking in New England as well as a top thirty national ranking in the eighteen and under division. In my mind, success was the only way to get into college. I understood the importance of the relationships, skills, and opportunities that a university education would offer. And perhaps more crucially, I realized that these future experiences and abilities would remain intact throughout the rest of my life.

I am well aware that tennis is no longer a future career. It is simply an instrument to further my education and pursue my dreams in medicine. I am currently committed to play college tennis next fall where I will continue my life as a student athlete. This college process, no matter how challenging, will be a vehicle for me like it was for my parents. And as for any vehicle, I must drive purposefully with a clear destination in mind.