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FD #1

Unit One Education Narrative Essay Final Draft 1

**THE POWER OF SPORTS**

It was August at the end of summer break, and I had finished 9th grade. I was at home watching a movie on my laptop when my parents called my brothers and me for an urgent family meeting. They began the meeting by informing us that my father had been promoted at work and we would have to move to another state. We would all be moving from Lagos, Nigeria, to Abuja, another state 100 miles away and my mother had already accepted a job in Abuja. We would be moving in two weeks, and I would have to begin in a new high school the following week. I grew worried since I knew I would struggle to fit into the new environment.

I arrived on a Sunday evening in September at my new boarding school, Emarid College. I began classes the following day, and I was nervous. "How am I going to make friends?" I wondered. "Would I ever see the kind of friends I'll relate to and connect with?" I pondered. " "Would it be simpler for me to earn high grades here?" I was also asking myself.

 On my first day, I heard the school's wake-up bell at 4:30 a.m., which woke me up, and then we had our hostel devotion. I took a bath and dressed after that. We were meant to have mandatory morning study time from 5:30 a.m. to 6:40 a.m., but because we had just started new classes, we were excused. Later, I went to our school parade, and then I went to the cafeteria to eat breakfast. I remember walking into the crowded cafeteria to have my breakfast, and several students turned around to stare at me, making me feel even more nervous. I was quickly labeled *the new girl*, which I despised since it drew a lot of attention to me, and I have always disliked being the center of attention. I could hear everyone whispering, “Is that the *new gir*l?”  I did not know where to sit down, or what table to join, so I had to take a place at an isolated table. Then Maxine introduced herself to me. She was tall, her hair in dreadlocks, in the school uniform: sky blue shirt and a dark blue pleated skirt. She was assigned to give me a tour and was friendly to me. Maxine was the first person I spoke to at my school and the only one I spoke to on my first day. She was the only friendly face I met. Maxine and I were in the same class and had the same schedule, so I spent the rest of the day with her. We attended our school's assembly after finishing our breakfast. Then we had ten 45-minute classes from 8:00 a.m. to 2:55 p.m., with a break from 11:00 a.m. to 11:40 a.m. After class, we had lunch from 3:00 to 3:30, and dinner followed from 6:30 to 7:30. Following supper, I had the rest of the evening to myself, but the lights went out at 10:00 p.m. This was how my first day went, as well as most of my weekdays when there was no morning, evening, or night study time.

I missed my friends from my old school. I missed teasing them, confiding in them, studying as a group, enjoying good times, and having them support me through terrible ones. Everything in my new school, especially the grading system, was new to me. In my previous school, we needed to score 75% or higher in order to receive an A, however, in my new school, we had to score 95% or higher. Consequently, I began to feel stressed, lost academic focus, experienced low academic self-esteem, and developed a continual sense of sadness. I was afraid that I would not be able to reach that level, so I thought a lot.

I once went to give my math instructor, Mr. Dozie, my assignment. When I walked inside Mr. Dozie's office, he was sitting on a tall blue chair behind a black wooden table. He told me to take a seat and that he needed to speak with me after I turned in my assignment, so I did as he requested and sat down. I started to feel uneasy because I thought I was in trouble; my hands started to sweat profusely, and my heart started to beat fast. He realized that I was nervous and assured me that I should not be and that I was not in any trouble, and I breathed in relief. He said, "I have noticed that you do not contribute to my class; you are brilliant; I see how you complete your assignments and receive good test scores, but when I ask questions during lessons, you do not try to respond." He said he observed that I did not socialize with my classmates. I admitted to him that I was still finding adjustment difficult and that I was uncomfortable speaking up in class. He insisted I try to participate in class so I can earn extra credit and engage with other students so they can help me if I need it. I decided to attempt to push myself outside of my comfort zone after talking with Mr. Dozie.

One Saturday morning, I decided to take a walk around my school to get to know my surroundings. Then I came across the football field, and next to it was the volleyball court, where I eventually saw a group of women playing volleyball. It was an outdoor volleyball court with bleachers for spectators. I sat in the bleachers and kept a close eye on the girls. I could see that the girls were having fun while simultaneously playing earnestly. When the opponents flung the ball across the net to the other side, one of the back-row setters would place the ball such that one of the front-row hitters could send it back across the net. To me, this was teamwork. Even when one of their teammates made a mistake, they maintained team spirit. Their teamwork motivated me.

A lot of different thoughts were going through my head. I started imagining, “What if I could play that sport and even compete on a team?” Then I wondered, “Would I ever be able to play as well as those girls?” At the same time, I started to have doubts, “But I am not tall enough to be good at volleyball.” Even though I had a lot of reasons why I would not be a good fit, I felt that joining the volleyball team would be a fantastic way for me to start making friends and not be labeled as *the new girl*.

I chose to try out for the volleyball team, so whenever I had free time, I called Maxine to help me practice because she was on the volleyball team. The tryouts took place on one Friday evening. After getting dressed, I prayed. Maxine followed me to the volleyball court, where the tryouts were taking place. We were six females trying out; we were all beginners, and only three of us were going to make the team because there were only three spots available. We were up against six other girls who were already on the team. Our opponents began with good service, and then the passing of the ball continued until our opponents made a mistake. It came time for one of my teammates to serve, which went smoothly until we missed the ball. Things began to go smoothly; we were rotating, and then it came time for my first service, which went well, much to my surprise. The game went on, but my second service did not go well, but I kept playing. The game continued, but our opponents reached the game point before us and scored their last point, giving them the first-half victory.

After that, halftime was called. I was getting hydrated around halftime when Maxine came over to compliment me. "You're doing great, and I'm confident you'll make the team; keep it up," she said. Maxine's statement made me joyful and motivated. We switched positions after halftime; our opponents went to our spot, while we went to theirs. This time, I was the first to serve the ball and begin the game, and I did it successfully. The game continued, and our opponents still reached the game point first and scored their last point, making them the overall winners. After they won, I did not feel bad because I understood they had more experience and deserved to win.

When it was time for the coach, coach Uche, to introduce the three girls who made the team, I began to get goosebumps, and my body temperature quickly rose, causing me to sweat heavily. He began mentioning the names, and when I heard my name, I could not believe it; everything felt surreal. My coach told me, "You still need to work on your service, but your passing, hitting, and setting technique are good." "I will do my best to improve on that," I replied. Everyone on the team gave me a warm welcome, but Maxine made me feel exceptionally welcome. She introduced me to all the team members and gave me their names. She informed me that Temple was the team captain and its top performer. Cherish, she claimed, was the most skilled ball server. She said Ihuoma had the best ball-setting skills. These are the details that I recall from that day.

Every day, after completing my assignments and everything else I had to do, I went for team practice. I started to improve because of my teammates' constant encouragement and correction of my mistakes. I mostly improved in serving the ball because I was not particularly good at it before, and my coach also noticed and commended me. I grew amazingly close to my teammates, and we eventually did everything together. We always walked to practice together, ate in the cafeteria together, and kept each other up to date on any school events. I remember my teammates and I going to the cafeteria immediately after practice to speak about all the boys we admired. This was the start of something special that offered me joy, wonderful friends, and a sense of belonging.

I felt like Colin Powell did when he joined the Pershing Rifles. He wrote: “My experience in high school, on basketball and track teams, and briefly in Boy Scouting had never produced a sense of belonging or many permanent friends. The Pershing Rifles did.” Colin Powell stated that the Pershing Rifles offered him a sense of belonging and many lifelong friends that his other high school teams could not. Joining the volleyball team gave me a sense of belonging, provided me with fantastic friends, and helped me come out of my shell.

I was never used to putting my whole trust in others. When I joined the volleyball team, I knew I had to work on that because there is no teamwork without trust. Putting my trust in my teammates allowed me to show my strength while scoring points and winning as a team, which was one of the aspects I enjoyed about this sport. Being on the volleyball team helped me in many aspects of my life.

In my academic life, playing volleyball reduced my stress, improved my focus, and improved my academic performance. After practicing volleyball, I realized that I always had more mental freedom, which helped me concentrate when reading. I became more motivated to learn because of this sport, and I worked extra hard to complete all my homework on time. While I needed strong academic standards to compete in games, it drove me to work hard to keep my GPA high. When I would want to put off finishing my assignments so I could play, I realize that I need all A's to compete in games, so I start finishing them right away.

Playing on the volleyball team helped my social life by enhancing my social skills and increasing my self-confidence. I started talking to my classmates and participating in class, which gave me the confidence to approach them for help when I needed it. This helped me in my academic life. I was able to meet helpful and kind friends by joining the volleyball team. Maxine was a friend I will always be grateful for. She always had my back and was willing to assist me. I will always spend time with Maxine on days when the other girls are not available. We always stuck together.

Overall, being a volleyball team member taught me that losses make you stronger. When we lose games, my coach will always tell us that “If we would like to become successful volleyball players, we should never give up on our way to success. We should continue to work hard even if our team has lost.” I applied this to every aspect of my life, and I made the decision to never give up. Volleyball helped me get out of my comfort zone, sharpen my thinking, restore my balance, and feel like I belonged. This was the best decision I had ever made.