August Harp

Free to Play

The birds are chirping, the morning dew is fresh, and a soccer ball lays at my feet. A perfect day is in store. Soccer, Football, Futbol, or Futbolas, whatever you call it, soccer is the world’s game. Some place, somewhere, at any given time, there is a child falling in love with “the beautiful game” the same way I did. There is nothing in the world better than the feeling of freedom you get from being on the soccer pitch. I play select soccer for Mississippi Rush, and I play for the Murrah soccer team. Despite that both teams play the greatest game on the planet, they are almost two entirely different sports.

I had played five years of recreational soccer and had enjoyed every moment of it; however, when I was nine years old I had to give up my shiny participation trophies in order to move on to the next level of the game: select. My first taste of soccer at its most competitive level came when I started to play select soccer for the Jackson Futbol Club. This was when I stopped playing for fun and started playing for wins. Since then I have traveled to places such as Memphis, New Orleans, Indianapolis, Florida, Little Rock, Birmingham, and North Carolina to compete with my team. Over the years, we’ve won countless tournaments, become the undisputed best team in Mississippi, and been to the United States National Soccer Tournament two years in a row. Despite my select team’s successes, I always felt like there was something missing.

Then I began middle school at Bailey APAC Middle School where I became one of the captains of the soccer team. Initially, soccer at Bailey was a joke. I’ll never forget my first practice when Coach Buffington asked us to dribble the soccer ball to the other side of the field. Half of the team picked up the ball and dribbled it like a basketball. Really. Yet it was strangely fun. There I was, playing for the best select team in the state, but somehow I was enjoying playing for one of the most pathetic teams I’d ever seen. I was back to my five year old self. I was having fun playing and not dreading the coach's response to a loss.

As I got more comfortable with the Bailey team we got better and better until, by the end of my eighth grade year, we were the JPS champions. Bailey was still not in the same dimension as my select team; but we were so much better than when we started, and the sense of accomplishment we felt was even more special knowing that.

Now, as a sophomore at Murrah, I continue to play school soccer. What we lack in experience we make up in heart and I know my Murrah teammates have my back no matter what. I also continue to play for my select team, the Mississippi Rush Premier team, and we are even more competitive than we have ever been. We are still expected to win every single game. Losing is not an option, and the pressure to stay in shape and perform is immense. In fact, now we are not only expected to be the best team in Mississippi; we are expected to be among the best in the nation. We have all the tools to do it, too. For starters, our coach is also the head coach at Belhaven University, we are sponsored by Chevrolet, all of our players are experienced and fit, and we have our own physical trainer.

At Murrah we don’t have all that. We have first time coaches, players who have only played for a year, and the year’s uniforms. But Murrah does have one thing select doesn’t. Murrah has nothing to lose, and because of that, we are free to play without the fear of losing.