The Star

Netball, more than a game

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Sweet victory: Harsimran (third from left) with her teammates after winning a tournament earlier this year.

Teen reflects on how the sport has shaped her personal growth

NETBALL has been more than just a sport for me; it has been a transformative journey that has shaped my life in profound ways.

What started as a simple hobby has grown into one of the main purposes of my life, teaching me invaluable lessons about balance, happiness, connection and resilience.

I was eight years old when I first picked up netball, joining a group of determined young girls whom I met at a gurdwara.

BRATS
Bright Roving Ambitious Talents

Every Saturday, we would gather at a club centre, eager to learn the fundamentals of the game. Those early days were filled with excitement and camaraderie as we practised together, watched gameplay and honed our skills. Little did I know that these humble beginnings would lead to a life-changing experience.

In 2017, I was selected to represent Kuala Lumpur in the under-12 category at the Malaysian Schools Sports Council competition in Kedah. This opportunity was both thrilling and daunting.

At such a young age, I was thrust into a world of intense training regimens, harsh discipline, and a completely different lifestyle. I recall staying in dorms and having to sleep on the cold marble floor because of the lack of space for the athletes.

I lost my appetite due to the cold food served, being unable to return home to my family for a period of time, and suffering injuries and pain from rigorous training.

The transition was challenging, but it taught me to keep an open mind and embrace the obstacles in front of me. I quickly learnt that to succeed, I had to adapt and push myself beyond my comfort zone. Netball has also gifted me with relationships that have had a lasting impact on my life. The sport is more than just physical activity; it is a team endeavour that requires trust, communication and mutual support. Over the years, I have formed deep bonds with teammates, coaches and even opponents. These connections have extended beyond the court, blossoming into friendships that have enriched my life in countless ways. The shared experiences of triumph and defeat in multiple tournaments have strengthened these bonds, reminding me that success is a collective effort.

Balancing academics and athletics has been one of the most significant challenges I've faced as a student-athlete. Like many others, I struggled to juggle the demands of schoolwork and intense training sessions.

Fortunately, growing up, my family was always there to remind me of the importance of time management and discipline.

My brothers encouraged me to take extra tuition lessons for my weaker subjects like Mathematics and Science, by offering more netball training as an incentive. Slowly but surely, I began to understand the importance of my academic pursuits.

Additionally, the discipline I gained from the sport helped me stay organised and focused in my studies. Netball also motivated me to excel in both areas, teaching me that success in one area does not have to come at the expense of the other. Netball demands both mental toughness and physical strength. Facing difficult opponents, dealing with setbacks, and persevering through gruelling training sessions have all contributed to building my resilience.

I have faced many challenges on the court, including unfair calls and treatment that still linger in my memory. But these experiences taught me valuable lessons in coping with adversity and maintaining a positive attitude.

The resilience I developed through netball has carried over into other aspects of my life, helping me navigate challenges with confidence.

Even after over a decade of playing netball, I still feel a sense of accomplishment after a well-played game. Netball has indeed brought me immense joy and I intend to continue playing it for as long as I can.

I would like to encourage my fellow teens to take up a sport. It can serve as a guiding force for personal growth and help you to become a better version of yourself

Have faith in the sport you are passionate about, and you'll find joy and success. Always put in your best effort, even when the odds are against you. Never let the fear of failure discourage you from trying.

Earlier this year, my teammates and I achieved a long-awaited victory, securing first place in a tournament after five years of coming up short. This triumph was a testament to our dedication and perseverance, reinforcing the power of resilience and teamwork.

Harsimran, 19, a student in Kuala Lumpur, is a participant of the BRATs Young Journalist Programme run by The Star's Newspaper-in-Education (Star-NiE) team. For updates on the BRATs programme, go to facebook.com/niebrats**.**

With the theme of the article in mind, carry out the following English language activities.

1 What is your favourite sport, and how has it shaped your personal growth? Share your thoughts with your friends.

2 Using words and pictures from today's newspaper, design a poster to motivate students to take up a sport. Work in groups of four, and once you are done, pin your poster on the classroom noticeboard.

The Star's Newspaper-in-Education (Star-NiE) programme promotes the use of English language in primary and secondary schools nationwide. For Star-NiE enquiries, email starnie@thestar.com.my**.**