“Where are your heads today?  You guys need to start pushing yourselves harder in practice starting right now!”

My whole volleyball team stood around in the dimly lit gym, air stuffy from the fall humidity, sweat dripping down our backs, each of us drained from our day at school and being in the midst of our first real volleyball season.  A few of us mumbled “okay” as our coach continued to lecture us about working harder.

“You need to forget about everything that has happened at school today and all of the work you have, and instead, focus on this practice!” Although we were having an extremely successful freshman volleyball team that year, our coach was not satisfied with our attitudes on this day.

“Yeah,” a few girls on the team mumbled back, the rest nodding their heads.

Our coach continued on: “You only have four years here, and one day you guys are going to look back and wished you could remember every second of it.”

There was a slight pause after this statement where no one really said anything as we listened to the squeak of shoes on the court next to us.  As we stood there, our coach’s words clicked in our heads.  We may not have understood exactly what she meant by this, but we could grasp it just enough:  Don’t waste your time on the court.  Work hard.  Have fun. Live for every moment because these times don’t last forever. My team understood.  So, we went to work: we pushed ourselves that practice and in the ones that followed. We improved after each practice and after each game.  We came together more as a team as the season progressed.

Towards the end of these couple months of volleyball I loved the sport so much more than I ever thought I would.  In general, I had learned to love sports as more than something to “stay in shape” or “keep busy.”  I found that they were what kept me sane in times of crazy loads of homework, yet they also allowed me to bond with people I never before would have.  In addition, I grew into a more outgoing person.  The practices taught me dedication to what I love.  The games showed me that hard work does pay off.  It’s not just a *cliché*.  It’s not just a false hope.  I found my passion, I guess you could say, and those words my coach said during that practice became so real.  I began to grasp just how quickly time marches forward; I realized that I would want to remember those days in the stifling gyms when the last warm days passed by in late September, and then as our team came to be in first place in our conference by the end of the season.

After the season had passed, I remembered my coach’s words. It started to take a new meaning in my head – or more accurately, it formed new ideas and dreams in my head.  I understood that playing sports was something I only had for a short time.  It was something I loved too much to give up after high school.  I knew now that if I were to choose a career that I would love forever, it would have to deal with sports.  Whether it be a coach, a sports marketer, or even a sports therapist, I had found the idea of what I had wanted to do with my life.  I couldn’t just leave behind some of the best parts of my four years in high school.

I understand now that none of the things that are actually worth it come easy, and goals to be achieved should never take for granted. So, my last sports season of my senior year, will not be the last time I do something with sports in my life.  I will make sure of that and always remember what my coach said my freshman year.   I hope it’s always there, reminding me not to sit back and watch people working harder for what they want.  I want to be that person who does what I love and doesn’t give up.  So, I have that one single day during freshman year to thank for much of my motivation.  As we were standing around in a circle, heat radiating around us, in the faintly lit gym, I understood I had to pursue what I loved and cherish the moments that being a member of a team have taught me.