

# Sportsmanship an important component for Sara Sahadi of Ridge



Competing in track and field can be difficult for a youngster who is a bit behind in talent, experience and confidence.

There's one coach with that kind of athlete in his program, and has worked with her to improve. But he also took an extra step recently when he noticed a positive, hard-working shot putter at a meet against another school, and asked her if she could speak to his athlete.

That other girl was Sara Sahadi, a senior from Ridge High School. She gladly took the time to counsel the younger athlete, giving her pointers as well as a pep talk.

It was a scene that caught the attention of an official working the meet, who made sure to spread word of Sara's kindness to the administration at her school.



The act is only one example of the selfless nature that is a significant part the West Point-bound student's life. It's also worthy of recognition during NJSIAA Sportsmanship Appreciation Week, sponsored by JAG-ONE Physical Therapy, that runs through May 14.

"We had a meet here and the coach came up to me and told me their girl was feeling discouraged because she had hit a rut," Sara recalled. "He saw me throwing and asked if I could help with her technique, because she was struggling."

Sara's first thought was to check with her own coach, Elizabeth Braga, to make sure that it would be okay. Braga gladly approved, especially since she thinks so highly of Sara's character.

"Sara is the most dedicated and driven athlete I have seen," Braga said. "Once she sets her mind to something, there is nothing that can get in the way of her accomplishing it. In terms of athletic performances, she strives for perfection and is her harshest critic. She is the one athlete you can always trust to be doing the right thing when nobody's watching. She is a natural leader, but over the past year has grown immensely as a team player and supportive teammate."

Helping out an athlete, even from another school, is part of Sara's overall makeup.

"I was very honored," she said. "It was a really humbling thing, and I found it very rewarding, because it's kind helping the next generation of throwers. I'm a senior and I hope to leave a positive legacy."



Sara, who also competes for Ridge in discus, javelin and an occasional running event, extends her supportive nature to her teammates as well.

“At the end of the winter season, when Sara broke the school record in shot, and wrote personal letters to all of her teammates competing at the Meet of Champions, it was clear that she was deserving of the title of captain for the spring season,” Braga said. “Sara always keeps things interesting by looking for new challenges, whether it is a 200, 400, or 1600.”

What makes her track and field story even more special is how it began. Her athletic experience in high school had consisted of competing on her own in taekwondo. But with her eyes set on West Point, she realized the odds of earning an appointment would improve with varsity sports experience. So she joined the track team as a junior, and was clearly a fast learner.

“I love this sport and I love my team,” she said. “I think it’s just a testament to show that if you really want something and if you’re really willing to put a lot of work in, you can succeed. I’m always one of the very last people at practice because I always try to get that last rep in.”

Then there’s her special reasoning for wanting to attend West Point.

“I want to serve my country,” she said. “I’m very

religious and I believe that God gave me gifts of determination and hard work, and because I have such a passion for my country, I felt like my gifts would be best used in that environment, and God just really put that on my heart to serve my country and to protect the people around me. I always thought of it that if people like me who had determination and a love for their country didn’t serve, then who will, and who would protect this amazing country that I’m so blessed to live in.”

Rich Shello, the Ridge athletic director, is proud to have a person like Sara representing the school, and for her positive efforts to be noticed by an opposing coach and an official.

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“By all accounts, she is very special,” he said. “We all know the old adage that being of sound character means doing the right thing when no one is looking. It is so true and often forgotten today with such emphasis on achievement or end result without regard to the process or journey. Great character is not a part time thing or a once in a while thing. It is on display for everyone to see 24/7. People are always observing others and often making judgements of them. A simple act of an individual when observed can provide a wealth of information to others, either positive or negative.”

Likewise, Sara’s successful late entry into varsity sports showcases the value of being a high school athlete.

“While participation in athletics may be part of a resume builder for students, it is so because of the tremendous opportunities and experiences that student-athletes receive through their participation,” Shello said.

“First and foremost, student-athletes learn to be accountable for their effort and commitment,” he noted. “Are they willing to be promptly in

attendance every day? Are they willing to put in the hard work on a daily basis over time to maximize their potential? Can they be trusted and depended upon by their teammates and coaches? Are they willing to be in situations that may be out of their comfort zone in order to improve? Do they maintain a positive can-do attitude when faced with challenge or adversity? Student-athletes obtain many valuable experiences in being part of a team from an affective perspective. They learn to work with others and accept roles for the best interest of the team.

“Team members encourage one another and also challenge one another every day in practice and events,” Shello said. “They learn leadership skills that can be applied in any area outside of the realm of sport. It is a special bond that exists between teammates who work so hard together that is so difficult to replicate in other settings.”

And in the case of Sara Sahadi, it has helped her on a path toward serving her fellow athletes, her school and country, while also showcasing the importance of sportsmanship.