

Massachusetts Letters About Literature Honors, Level III | 2011

Dear Mr. Dan Shaughnessy,

Good old Bean Town. I'm an Irish Massachusetts' guy, too. South Shore to be exact. About a 30-minute ride to Boston. It's a great place to live, and Boston sports never disappoint. The Red Sox make the playoffs almost every year and had arguably the greatest sports comeback in history in 2004, the Pats are the NFL dynasty team of the decade, the Bruins continue to improve and look to be as dominant as they were in the 70's, and the Celtics are looking for lucky number 18 in their attempts to stay ahead of the Lakers for the most NBA championships all-time. There's never a dull moment for sports fans. And this would be your forte considering your line of work. Being a sports journalist for the *Boston Globe* must be an exciting job. I've read several of your articles and when your book *Senior Year* came out I figured it would be a book I'd enjoy.

That's actually why I am writing to you on this cold November day. My mom brought the book home for my dad for him to read. He didn't seem too interested. Don't get me wrong he likes to read he just said that it wasn't for him. I didn't want my mom to waste her money, and I've heard about your book through local media and what not, so I figured I'd take a crack at it. What drew me in was the baseball field on the cover. Naturally, I assumed that the book would be about baseball. As soon as I cracked it open and read the first couple pages I knew right away that I would be interested and continued to read. In only 15 pages the book was able to impact me. I'm usually the one on the field and now I'm able to see the game through a parent's eyes. My dad has played baseball his whole life and I usually hear what he thinks of my performance right while I'm playing my game but I know it's only constructive criticism. But as I read the pages I was able to see how he might feel about how I do and how it can affect him. It made me realize that I can control how I play and I can step it up when the time comes. Yes it's frustrating when I strike out or make an error but like I said I can control that, my dad can't. Now I'm able to understand why he gets upset when I make a bonehead move or strike out looking or swinging at something in the dirt. It's because he wants me to succeed but he can't do it for me. I have to do it on my own. I'm the one wearing the uniform and out there on the baseball field or basketball court. You helped me realize that.

I was really able to relate to Sam. I've been playing baseball my whole life. I'm a freshman in high school and I hope to make the team this spring. I'm only a small guy at about 5' 8" and hitting is not exactly my strongest point. I'm almost the opposite of Sam in attributes. He's a good hitter but doesn't exactly have exceptional wheels or glove. As for me, I couldn't hit the broad side of a barn. I've never been a hitter. I always work at it and try my best to improve but I'll never have that sweet swing so many players have. I rely on my speed and my fielding ability. These things just come naturally to me the way hitting does to Sam. You were able to help me recognize that even the best have slumps. It's unavoidable. You can't go 3-4 every game with a bomb and a two-bagger. It just doesn't work that way. You need to be able to take the good with the bad. There will be days where five opportunities will be given to hit the ball and all five times send you back to the dugout hanging your head and wishing you had that last pitch back again because you know that it was a meatball. But you can't live in the past. You have to live for the next at-bat, or that next ground-ball hit your way. You either make the play or you don't. It's that simple. But no matter what happens you have to move on and look ahead to what's already on its way.

But most importantly Mr. Shaughnessy, *Senior Year* showed me something I never really took the time to notice before. Fathers and sons connect through sports. Without them father-to-son relationships wouldn't be as strong and have as much meaning. There would be forced conversations that make anyone involved feel awkward. So awkward almost to the point where you do the "play dead" technique and hope it just leaves you alone. Car rides to and from the field provide a great time to have such talks but the ride home usually consists of the speeches of "back in my day" or the classic "when I was your age." We've heard all these stories before. Multiple times most likely but we, as sons, let dads tell such stories because we know it gives a sense of pride. Nothing wrong with that. We understand the self-confidence that comes along with "I remember the time I..." What I'm getting at here is that fathers and sons communicate through experiences that happen on the ball field or the basketball court or the gridiron. You made this clear. Sure sports are great but they link the two different eras. They fill that time gap. Every baseball fan knows The Catch, or the last man to hit .406. When fathers and sons talk about these things it leads to deeper conversations and allows us to open up and make it clear how we feel about certain things. Yes I know that sounds corny but it's true. Your book gave a great example of this.

When I finished your book and put it down, I really thought about the message you were trying to get across. I think I understand what you were trying to say. Let's just say that when I get older, and hopefully have a son of my own, I won't be the dad leaning over the chain-linked fence holding the camera.

Sincerely,

Sean

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