

Candidate 1 evidence

My Tennis Identity

Training endless hours a week, making sure every stroke is of a high standard, aiming to perform with the best; tennis brings me moments of joy and relief but also anger and discomfort. I have to stay physically and mentally strong all year round for the constant competitive matches. You could say tennis has taken over my life, but the question is, is it worth it?

Recently, I travelled to the magnificent island of Majorca to participate in a training camp for a week and compete against a Majorcan Academy in a friendly match with the South of Scotland squad. This was an excellent experience which saw me face many challenges along the way such as playing on a new court surface in the boiling heat with little time to adapt, playing in thirty-degree heat with little rest time. Looking back now, I realize how tough these conditions were, but it motivated me to achieve as much as I could in tennis to compete at that level.

I often feel that my training schedule is intense, especially during the summer. Training every day for around six weeks during the summer holidays, is always going to be physically tough; however, my dedication and motivation led on to greater things by winning many titles throughout this last summer break, varying from club championships to Scottish Opens. During the winter period my training is much more endurance and weight training, making me physically ready for the season ahead and staying fit throughout the Christmas holidays. During the winter break, as well as gym work, I also train indoors in Edinburgh facilities. This is good as I can play all year round and keep my high level up but, it also leads to tiredness and frustration as I rarely get a long period of time to rest which is often much needed after intense training camps or competitions.

I love the competitive side of Tennis, especially with my team beside me: my coach, parents and friends. They motivate me massively while I am competing even if they do get on my nerves sometimes with their excessive clapping or shouting. Looking back now I realise they only wanted the best for me and were simply trying to motivate me on court...I hope. There's nothing worse than a pushy parent from the sideline! Many think I am where I am today because of my hard work and dedication however, they are not entirely right. I wouldn't be where I am without the support from family: driving me to training and paying

for sessions and training camps. My mum has always said she can't wait until I'm seventeen so I can learn to drive and I don't blame her. My coach also has been invaluable planning sessions to work on improving parts of my game for future matches and tournaments and giving up a lot of his time to coach whilst balancing the time commitments of another job.

I have many idols and players I look up to including, Murray, Federer and Nadal. Another is Maria Sharapova, who said, "I've been playing against older and stronger competition my whole life. It has made me a better tennis player and able to play against this kind of level despite their strength and experience." (www.BrainyQuote.com.) This particularly resonates with me, as I grew up the youngest brother playing against my brother and his mates. This helped me to play against more powerful opponents and help me build up physically as a tennis player. It also helped me mentally by going into a match expecting the worst, however after beating older players it helped me to go into every match with an open mind and go for the win each time. Despite idolizing Andy Murray, it was much closer to home where I found my immediate inspiration as I played every day because of my brother.

Tennis is a difficult sport to participate in all year round, especially in Scottish conditions. All courts in my local area are outdoor hardcourt, which flood easily. This affects the South of Scotland tennis district, and as we don't have all year-round facilities like Edinburgh or Glasgow, we often have matches cancelled due to poor conditions. Other district coaches and players admire the strength of the Scottish Border players considering the facilities we have.

One experience I will never forget is the Kilgraston Championships, which is an inter-district competition with every county in Scotland. I got to play for the U18s even though I was 15. This was a fantastic opportunity for me to play older and better players from all over Scotland. Looking back now I realise how tough it was for Team Borders as we had the youngest team. One moment I will never forget is the last place play-off, struggling with a young team we faced the Highlands. I was playing singles with a huge crowd cheering me on, with up to 100-200 people - the atmosphere was incredible. I gave one of my best performances that day for the crowd to witness; it felt like I was playing at the Davis Cup. This boosted my confidence massively after winning this match as I knew I could achieve what these older players were, if not better, if I stuck in and worked hard.

I have had many long-term goals in Tennis, but one I would love to achieve is to move to Majorca to become a coach; after playing at Santa Ponsa Tennis Academy I realised how much I loved the tennis there and the lifestyle, being surrounded by constant happiness of the locals and Spanish coaches who motivate you extreme amounts. This really inspired me to work towards my goal as this may be my future, I hope. However, I would need to budget as a large part of my wages would go towards sun cream as fair skin and Spanish sun is not a good mix! Another goal of mine is to start my coaching qualifications very soon as I want to encourage and improve young players like my coaches have done for me.

Overall, I love my tennis identity as I get to travel and have made friends for life as well as loads of fantastic memories that I will cherish forever. I have also learned about hard work and dedication, never to give up to whatever I put my mind towards. Moving forward I know there will be much more to come. Tennis will always be with me throughout my life whether I am playing competitively or coaching youngsters to be the best they can. I feel Tennis has made me the person I am today. After facing many challenges, to have young borders players watching and supporting my matches and looking up to me is an unbelievable feeling as I can help motivate young players to set their goals to work towards in the future.

Word count- 1149

Candidate 2 evidence

Broadly Creative: Personal
The Christmas Season

Christmas is a time to be spent with family and loved ones and will always be a time of year that I hold close to my heart. Family time has always been important to me and I cherish all the memories of Christmas past. The passing of time sadly means that things can't always stay the way we want them too and traditions cannot always be kept. As I've grown up throughout the year's traditions have been changed and adapted but the meaning behind all the chaos and madness remains the same. The Christmas season is a time meant to be celebrated with family and loved ones and it has brought along with it many of my favourite memories...

I will always remember running down the stairs on those chilly December mornings, my feet moving so fast not only because of the adrenalin but also not wanting my bare feet to touch the cold floor. I reach for the handle of the living room door, open it wide and be mesmerized by the glow of the twinkling lights around the room. Forgetting the time in my excitement I scream, "He's been! He's been!" alerting everyone else in the house and waking them up, which I now profusely apologise for. Footsteps begin getting louder and faster as the rest of my family make their way down the stairs to join me. My mum heads to make us hot chocolate and tea, my dad goes to turn on the heating and my older brother makes room on the couch for us to sit. Christmas music fills the room as I begin to hand out presents to everyone, eager to see their happy faces light up and to open my own presents as well. My mum with her camera in hand records my brothers and I's every move as we, not so delicately, rip open our presents. Of course, presents aren't all Christmas is about, but it is very hard, as a young child, not to get swept away in the excitement of it all.

The morning passes quickly and I spend the time playing with the new toys and games (with my mum tidying up behind me). Soon enough it's time to go to my grans house for Christmas dinner. We set off on foot walking in the snow, which feels like clouds underneath our toes. Everyone is calm and enjoying the walk along when all of a sudden. Splat! The first snow ball was launched across the road and landed right on my dad's back. We spun around simultaneously to see my brother fumbling around in the snow in hysterics until suddenly he realized his mistake. Quickly my brother rushed to his feet in an attempt to run but to no avail, Splat! Another snowball has flown through the air and landed right in my brother's face. Cheers followed by laughter filled the streets and then, almost instantaneously, snowball after snowball soared through the sky. Nowadays my brother and I don't see as much of each other as he has moved away and rarely visits anymore, this makes me appreciate the little moments we shared when we were young.

I fall to the ground and begin to gather up snow and roll it up into a ball. I drag the ball along the floor and watch as it gets bigger and bigger. I do the same two more times and place it carefully on top of the other to make the snowman's head. Quickly I grab some small stones and place them on its head and wrap my scarf around its neck. In the business of it all I take a step back to admire my masterpiece but before I get the time to a snowball hits me on the back of the head and I turn around to join in on all the commotion. This must

have been the last time we had a white Christmas, nowadays all we see is a measly covering which turns into soggy slippy slush on the ground after only a few hours.

Christmas dinner is always chaotic. Gran manically running around, busy in the kitchen trying to pull everything together while the rest of us relax in the living room enjoying the festive atmosphere. Christmas music plays in the background while we share stories of Christmas past. These days gran isn't as quick and nimble on her feet and reluctantly has to accept help from the rest of the family. We still have the music playing in the background but not as much time for the storytelling as we all chip in and help with cooking a traditional Christmas dinner.

After stuffing our faces like the Christmas turkey, we all retire to the festively decorated living room and slump in the comfy couch. This is shortly followed by the annual 80s pop music trivia game hosted by my brother Aaron, which ultimately results in mum and dad winning as this was their era. As I am older now, the responsibility of hosting falls upon me and all the control is in my hands.

But it has never been just Christmas day itself that I hold so closely in my heart. No one can truly appreciate just one day by itself, there must be a lead up. Something that helps to build up the anticipation and excitement that makes Christmas all that better. Some may argue that this happens all year through and that we are all just waiting for the 25th of December to come around so we can all celebrate together. But I think it's safe to say that we all begin to feel properly in the festive spirit as soon as bonfire night is over, and the supermarkets starts to play Christmas music. Shimmering lights shine up the streets and children take to the streets snowballs at the ready. Although its cold outside, with our noses frosted over, its warm in our hearts as we are all brought together by the smell of hot chocolate. The family gathered together yet again, ready to make more memories for years to come.

(1,018)

Candidate 3 evidence

Lessons on guitar, experiences for life

From an early age, I have always been surrounded by music. Whether that was hearing my brother play guitar around the house, or various music channels that always seemed to blaring constantly, or family occasions where there always seemed to be a soundtrack in the background. It has consistently been a part of my everyday life in some way or another. I've always adored the ways that instruments sound. The thundering kick of a drum. The low rumble of a bass guitar. Even the mellow and relaxing notes of a saxophone. But there was one instrument that really grabbed my attention much more easily than the others, and that was the guitar.

A guitar is one of those instruments that simply can't be ignored. I'm sure it doesn't come to surprise many people that some of the greatest songs ever written contain a guitar at the forefront. Whenever I heard a punchy, in-your-face guitar riff when I was young, or a breathtaking guitar solo, I was instantly sucked into the music. I was transported to another place entirely. Hearing different instruments had such a colossal impact on me mainly because I was young, and hearing something so new and unheard of me filled me with excitement. So by that point I was convinced. I knew I wanted to learn the guitar.

Frustrated. That's how I felt when I began learning guitar. I remember being so convinced that I could simply pick up a guitar and be able to play whatever I wanted, no matter how difficult. Unfortunately, I quickly learned this wasn't the case. When learning anything, you have to start from scratch. Having to stretch my fingers to every note that seemed exhausting and sore was a real struggle, especially since my hands were much smaller back then. However, not for one second did I let this dishearten me. I was determined to learn and my passion and newfound interest in music is what guided me along. By the end of my first lesson, I had managed to pluck out a tune that almost resembled "Smoke on the water", an infamous song that almost any beginner will have learned. My family must have been sick of hearing it over and over as I tirelessly tried to perfect that small section of the song. But that electricity that always seems to flow through me when I pick up a

guitar has never really left me. To this day, although I'm more of an experienced player, the concept of learning and practising a song can still be challenging. But that's what I feel learning an instrument is all about, and that challenge is one of the main parts I love so much about it.

Learning guitar was something initially for myself, but as time went on I began to discover my passion for music was something I could share with other people. You can watch bands play as often or as much as you like on TV or in real life, but the experience of actually performing within a band is so drastically different and it makes you view music from a new perspective. The very first time I performed in front of an audience was quite daunting to say the least. Looking back, it may have been a smaller venue, but to my 11 year old self, it felt like I was headlining a massive festival and I was getting ready to play for my thousands of fans. I can laugh at the thought of that now, but that's how important music was to me and still is to this day. It was time to perform. Countless hours of sitting in my bedroom plucking and strumming away, while hearing the muffled shout of my mum telling me to either keep the noise down or to come get my dinner, and how my brother would teach me new chords and introduce me to new music, it was all leading up to this moment. I remember how my nerves consumed me, and how the electricity of my excitement was battling with the nerves of playing in front of other people for the first time. The second I began playing, my anxiousness began to fade away and I felt like I was transported to another place yet again. It seemed my excitement had ultimately won the battle. Stage lights that beamed down on me with sweat dripping down my face, trying to look out into the crowd but seeing nothing but darkness and only the slight silhouettes of those in attendance. Picking up the guitar from its stand, with the buzzing of the amplifiers and the emphatic fusion of the band that reverberated right through me. The proudest moment for me playing in bands and performing without a doubt has to be when I took part in a Battle of The Bands a couple of years ago. I remember being backstage in the practise room where all the instruments of those competing were kept, and hearing the laughter of my bandmates as we waited to go on that stage. Maybe we were laughing and joking to distract ourselves from our nerves, but really it was the excitement we felt to

be playing together. It was time. Those striking stage lights were on and ready to beam down on me. Goosebumps all over, I hear the calling out of our names. The roar of the crowd was that of a Roman colosseum, and how I felt like a Gladiator getting ready to battle. Once I was on that stage, it was really a blur. The moment of walking on the stage and picking up a guitar to walking off feels like seconds. But that just shows you how fun it really is. I suppose it would feel like a million years would have gone by if you made a mistake, or sang the wrong lyrics, or even worse, tripping and even falling off the stage. Thankfully, I've not experienced the latter. But even when I forgot lyrics or played the wrong chord, I never once felt embarrassed or wanted to run off stage, the confidence I gained playing in front of others allowed me to simply move on and keep playing. I felt truly unstoppable. In fact, the times where I've felt the most confident is when I've been on a stage, sharing my passion with other people and performing. Learning an instrument can be truly tough and frustrating, but massively rewarding, as it's helped me to grow as a person and enhance my passion for music.

No matter where I am, however I'm feeling, I find great comfort in being able to pick up a guitar and begin playing whatever comes to mind. The power of music is truly unparalleled to anything I've ever experienced before. Why I play guitar nowadays, although I'm older, is for pretty much the same reasons. People like to use escapism to distract them from any problems in their lives, and I certainly feel this way about playing guitar. Like anyone, it's never an easy time growing up, and I can truly say my love for music and playing guitar has got me through some tougher times and has had the greatest impact on me as a person. My first guitar lesson wasn't just the start of me learning an instrument, the impact of that day is far greater than just that. Music opened up a new world for me in so many ways.

1252 words.

Candidate 4 evidence

Happiness is Egg Shaped

If a Martian were to come to earth and watch this spectacle I wonder what they would think? I suppose it would be something along the lines of why is the ball so awkwardly shaped? What's the aim of the game? Why do they have to go backwards to go forwards? Why is there really fit ones and really fat ones? I wonder if Martians even play sports, do they understand the sheer elation that competition can bring. Perhaps they could use some superpowers to excel and surpass us at our own game. The chances of extra-terrestrial beings arriving on this earth is improbable but ,if they did, I am sure my chances of persuading them to love this game as much as I do are odds on. Let's start from the beginning, and why I love rugby.

Even although I had been on this earth for six years I don't think I had experienced the sheer happiness and sense of belonging that I felt in the car on the way home that day. The memories are still engrained in my mind like initials carved on a tree. The lights were glaring, the grass was glimmering and it was a crisp dark winter's night. There was laughter and sporadic shouts for the ball to be passed as the teams warmed up. There was a mass of black and red strips swarming round the pitch. As my mum and I approached the group that we guessed were my age, I could feel eyes locking on to me, staring me down, more and more with every step I took. I could sense everyone was talking about me and I started to question why I had come. But, to my surprise, when I finally reached the squad I was greeted by a small, spindly figure who introduced himself as Adam with a welcoming smile. Adam turned out to be the coach's son and he accompanied me to the rest of the players. After quick introductions the coach went straight into a game, which I was really nervous about as I would be getting physically tackled for the first time. The training began and it wasn't long before I saw the ball hurling towards me. I reached out with my widespread hands and somehow caught the ball. I froze with panic like a deer in headlights. I didn't know what to do with this odd shaped ball. Before I knew it, I was hurtled backwards onto the clammy ground and ,even though this took the wind out of me and I felt slightly uneasy, I got a frisson of excitement and from that moment I knew this was my sport and it would become much more than just the feeling of that first tackle.

Rugby took over my life not just playing games on a Sunday but it gave me a great group of

friends, taught me discipline and gave me goals in life and something to strive towards. I soon picked up on the essential skills required to become a better player. I started passing the ball, making the tackles, seeing the spaces and playing a big part in the team. The coaches were great but I also spent a lot of time learning from online videos; rugby started to take over my life. All I wanted to do was eat, sleep and breath rugby. My game started to improve and I loved the praise I received from the coaches, parents and my fellow players. As years went by I won player of the year for the club on a few occasions and I was put forward for trials which would take me a step closer to my dream. Everything was going so well until the day of the accident.

It wasn't even rugby related, that's the most frustrating part. Normally safety nets are there to save lives but on this day it ruined mine. It was one of my team mate's birthdays and we were invited to an activity day, all was fun and games until the final event.

As always I put in 110% but as I fell from the obstacle and my hand caught in the netting, I felt my shoulder

being wrenched from its socket. One thought went through my head when the sudden realisation hit me that I had dislocated my shoulder.

I was right. After two years of rehabilitation and continued attempts to play I have had to give up on my dream. But as you grow up you realise that dreams don't always come true, they might just change slightly. I still attend training and feel part of the team, they call me the water boy but that's ok because they are my mates and the teasing makes it more bearable. But the passion continues.

As the band of kilted musicians stand in the middle of the pitch, the roaring crowd falls silent and rises to their feet. The players are lined up like soldiers, shoulder to shoulder as if waiting for orders. The pipes blast into action and all the Scots start to chant the words of the national anthem. The excitement, anticipation and realisation that the game is about to begin. When that first whistle is blown it puts a smile upon my face and many others in the hope that your home team will come out on top. As both teams' scores build, the clock ticks on and voices rise as the tension mounts; anyone could steal the win in the blink of an eye. A lot comes down to fitness but there is also a degree of mental strength required to keep 110% effort throughout the game. I can remember how this felt when I played as you were always gasping for breath, legs feeling like lead and the agony from all the painful clashes.

It truly is a challenge in itself to keep playing as hard as you can. So I cheer even louder to try help them through these tough moments in their game. Sometimes they win sometimes they lose but on the odd occasion that they are victorious it's a special memory that stays with you for a lifetime.

So if a Martian spaceship landed on earth tomorrow in Scotland I would greet them, saltire in hand and whisk them off to Murrayfield. They'd soon come to terms with the rules and understand that an ovate ball adds to the excitement due to its unpredictability. Hopefully, after their brief encounter of this magnificent game, they'd come to the realisation that they have experienced the best sport in the world, or even the universe, and that 'happiness truly is egg shaped'.

Word count:1116