

It was the 3rd quarter, and we were up by 1, a lead that was unstable in a game as fast and unforgiving as lacrosse. My lungs burned as the crowd roared. We were on the verge of making history: the first CIF Championship in women's sports for our school. The roar of the crowd faded, replaced by the low hum of Izabela's car stereo that morning. The morning air was thick, filled with anxiety and anticipation. My stomach turned; I knew this would be the last game of the season, whether we won or lost. But for the sake of our seniors, we had to win.

As I go to defend the opposing team, I tighten my grip on the stick. I had to stop this goal from going in, otherwise we'd tie. A risk I didn't want to take. However, the attacking woman was fast and agile with her movements, passing each defender, and she finally got to me. In a panic, I made an illegal play, one too aggressive against the opposing girl and one that the referee didn't see. I caused a turnover, and for a moment, I was relieved that I had gotten away with it; however, my heart became heavy. I didn't want to win based on a lie. I looked around at my teammates, their faces lit with hope. I could keep silent and continue the play, or I could be a leader and own up to my actions. My stomach turned, I caught the attention of the referee and signaled that I had made an illegal pick, the ref blew the whistle, and overturned the ball on the opposing team. In the moment my teammates were confused, and angry with me. Why couldn't I just continue playing? Why would I give the opposing team an advantage? And for a moment, I did regret my decision. However, looking over to my coach, they gave me a nod of approval. As if I had done something right. The game restarted, and the energy on the field shifted. The crowd was quieter, waiting to see what would happen next. I could feel the eyes of both teams on me; some skeptical, others respectful. I focused on my breathing, reminding myself why I had made that choice. It wasn't about being perfect; it was about being honest.

As the minutes ticked down, we played with renewed determination, not just for the scoreboard but for the integrity of the game. Every pass, every sprint, felt like proof that we were earning this win the right way. The final whistle blew, and we had done it. We had won the CIF Championship, fairly and with our heads held high. That moment changed how I think about leadership and success. Since that day, I carry that lesson with me in everything I do. Whether in sports, school, or life, I strive to be the person who stands up for fairness and honesty, even when it's not the easiest path.