

SACRIFICING FOR SPORTS

— *many athletes have to make life changing decisions* —

BY LUKE HOLLAND

Quitting. Giving up. Throwing in the towel. It's never easy. It doesn't matter what it is: giving up on something comes with consequences as well as benefits. There are never any black and white areas when it comes to why students would quit something they love. Whatever influences them, they alone are responsible for the decision to continue, or to quit. Everyone who plays a sport has to make sacrifices to stay with it, or else sacrifice the sport for something else. And there's usually no going back.

Senior David Leichty has made countless sacrifices to stick with the sport he loves. His life has had soccer at the core since he was four years old. He has had to give up countless opportunities in his social life, including time spent with friends and family, to play soccer. But he loves the responsibility it comes with.

"It's great because no matter what role you have, whether you're team captain or on the bench, it comes with leadership," Leichty said. "Leadership is contagious."

His love for soccer has not diminished in the 13 years he has been playing.

"I wake up every day, and I still love it just as much," Leichty said.

And his dedication has paid off. Leichty plays for the Reserves on Sporting Kansas City. He has accepted this chance with one downside: he would have to quit playing high school soccer. And though it was the chance of a lifetime, and he has no regrets, leaving was without a doubt a bittersweet decision for Leichty, and though it was an amazing opportunity, there is a certain part of him that regrets missing out on the experience of finishing out a school sport in his senior year.

"There's just something about playing for your school, under the lights, that I'll miss," Leichty said.

Others have been forced out of their sport by circumstances beyond their control.

Seniors Andrew Siefken has been playing basketball ever since kindergarten. He developed knee problems in seventh grade, and from that point they just continually got worse. There was never a sudden game-changing injury, but the pain and severity gradually grew throughout middle school

and some of high school. He played for JV his freshman year, and started playing for varsity his junior year. He played three games before he had to get a serious knee surgery.

"The doctor told me after the surgery that it would be best if I quit basketball," Siefken said.

Leaving the team after dedicating his whole life to basketball was incredibly hard, but there was no choice. It was either quit, or risk the high likelihood of severe knee problems a few years down the road. It was one of the hardest decisions he has had to make this far in his life.

"We were pretty close," Siefken said. "When you're on a team, everyone becomes family over the season."

Life since then has been different. He has a lot more free time, which is a completely different experience after a life dedicated to sports. And those years were not spent in vain.

"It helped me learn time management," Siefken said. "You have to be dedicated to the team and show up for practice, or you can't play."

Coach Travis Gatewood is not new to the trials that his players go through and the sacrifices they make. He has been coaching for 17 seasons, and every year he has a couple players who leave the team for one reason or another.

"Sometimes it's injury, sometimes it's because they can specialize in another sport," Gatewood said. "High school is a time for the kids to figure out their niche."

It's hard to watch athletes walk away from a sport, but he understands that it's never easy, and that whatever they decide is probably going to be the best choice for them in the long run.

"It's difficult, because we want to have the best team possible," Gatewood said. "If their heart isn't in it, though, they aren't able to give everything they can for the team."

No matter what the situation, quitting anything signifies the end of something big in someone's life. But it's also the beginning of a new stage. The important part is that those who choose to leave something they love are confident about their decision, and are ready to take on the new challenges that life is bound to present.

WORTHIT?

**IS ALL OF THE TIME
AND COMMITMENT
THE RIGHT CHOICE?**

3.1%

OF HIGH SCHOOL
PLAYERS ACTUALLY
PLAY IN COLLEGE

01%

LESS THAN ONE
PERCENT OF COLLEGE
ATHLETES ACTUALLY
MAKE IT TO THE

44,000

NUMBER OF ATHLETES
THAT WILL BE DRAFT-
ED ONTO A PROFES-
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