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The First Tee

IJGA Camp Experience Essay/Reflection

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“We hope you will enjoy your stay here as an IJGA student.” Unaware of the truthfulness of this statement as I stepped foot into my temporary home for the week, the realization sets in as I begin to reflect on the best and most memorable week of my life. Despite the tiring nonstop schedule, my life as an International Junior Golf Academy student seemed to have taken place in the blink of an eye. Words could never express my gratitude toward the acceptance into this academy, as this was also my first time away from home. Immediately, I felt right at ease with my newly made friends all within minutes of arriving on campus. Though my fellow IJGA peers came from around the globe, I promised myself to never let distance get in the way between us and our friendships.

Within seconds of arrival on my first day Sunday afternoon, jokes and laughs were already being unleashed. As soon as registration was complete, I made my way up to the third floor in apartment 1131. Interestingly enough, I was greeted the same moment by two full time students. With their english somewhat broken, both students from India and Japan live in the apartment I would eventually stay in as full time schooling and golf. The apartment consisted of three bedrooms, each one housing two girls (six in total), along with a restroom per bedroom, a living room, and kitchen. After finding my name on my bedroom door, I hesitantly walked in with my arms nearly falling off from the heavy luggages. My roommate had not yet arrived, so I randomly picked a bed and side of the closet. After making my decision, I soon started unpacking and making myself at home to find my parents getting ready to leave. With their eyes nearly watering, it was time for mama and papa bear to leave their young one behind. As we proceed to say our goodbyes, one of my new roommates walks in, and soon to find out staying in the bedroom next to mine. Soon after getting to know her for a little while, both of our parents leave. Not long after, I hear footsteps walking into my room to find her walking in to say hello. Time passes with us getting to know each other, and decide to go to Pinecrest Golf Course for

extra practice before the first official day. Once we arrive to the course, stares are thrown at me by a familiar face. Long story short, I find myself talking face to face with someone I haven't seen in nearly two years after playing competitive golf with. An ironic act of coincidence, we both assumed. Once 8:30 pm strikes, we return back to the housing complexes for a review of rules and prepare for the next busy day to come.

Alarm set and ready at six o'clock in the morning, my first official day of camp as a golf student had just begun. Scarfing down breakfast in under a few minutes and struggling to lug my golf clubs and push cart into the van, I was offered assistance by many. Being the only participant from The First Tee of North Florida, I boarded the shuttle hardly knowing a single face. Somewhat of a silent drive with teenagers from around the world half asleep, we arrive at Pinecrest Golf Course once again. Those scheduled to meet with Hank Kim, previous PGA Professional and our coach for the week, gather around to meet and greet one another. With only seven of us in a group (four guys and three girls), we each say a little something about ourselves and get broken off into pairs. To kick off our first training activity, we start out with mental coaching. Interestingly enough, this mental coaching was very different than that of what I had expected. To me, it had felt as if we were just playing a friendly competitive game of chipping. However, this was the beauty of it all. Having an opponent drives you to work harder and push your game to it's utmost ability. After realizing how simplified this activity was, and the reason behind it, we all congratulated our opponents, and moved on to the driving range for our swings to be analyzed through iPad. After our swings were analyzed, it was time for lunch. Over an hour of lunch and more jokes and laughter, we went straight to the first hole to play a guys versus girls scramble. Though we did not officially keep score, it was a great way to get to know the three girls with whom I would be spending the next week with. Now looking back, I have realized how much I have enjoyed playing golf with friends and without the pressures of competition. Being able to take what I have learned each day and apply it on the course also led me to rely more on myself rather than my parents telling me what to correct. By the time the round was over, we made our way back to the shuttle van and drove back to Pinecrest to store away our golf clubs in lockers, with which we would utilize at the beginning and end of everyday. After once again hopping back on the vans, we make our way to the housing complex for downtime and

afternoon/evening activities. My roommates, newly made friends, and I decided to make a quick Target run for extra snacks, water bottles, etc. By the time we make our way back to the van, dinner time quickly sets in. Soon after dinner, my newly made group of friends and I make our way to the pool for chicken fights, getting to know each other more, and just pure pool fun. Time flies when you're having fun, and as for us, this was true. It was time to make our way back to our apartments before curfew for bedtime. Every night, our camp leaders would come in around 10:30 pm to check on us and make sure we're in bed and ready for the next day to come.

*\*Buzz Buzz Buzz\** My alarm once again goes off to jumpstart my second day at IJGA. After my roommate and I get ready for the day, we make our way down to the IJGA cafe for breakfast, which we proceed to do everyday along with every other camper. Tummies filled and ready to move along with the day, we jump on the vans to take us to Pinecrest. Moments within arriving to the course, we then hop back onto the shuttle to make our way to Crescent Pointe Golf Course. Teeing off almost immediately after we arrived to the unfamiliar course, we decided once again to play in a guys versus girls scramble. Soon, another round of getting to know my group passes once again. This also created a bond between my coaches and I, who in addition to my group, became good friends of mine. After arriving back at Pinecrest for lunch, we made our way to the IJGA Performance Center. There, we learned different stretches, workouts, and had our swings analyzed. Though having a coach help you with your swing is beneficial, seeing your swing in person is even more helpful. This gave me the ability to see what I was doing wrong and correct it to see the right results. This led me to become aware of my extended lag. Apparently, lag is not something that comes through teaching, but rather something we inherit from the moment we pick up a golf club for the first time. Some have it more than others, or some do not possess this at all. Beneficial yet harmful, lag has to be used the proper way, which I have found I was not. Now, I can take control of my lag and put it to good use during play by squaring up my clubface during impact. After our swings were analyzed, we made our way to a personal trainer to learn stretches to achieve greater flexibility. Surprisingly, after warming up and stretching more, my muscles actually felt looser and it was easier to swing clubs freely. Another long day at camp passes and evening arrives on us. After having a quick dinner, we make our way to the vans to proceed to the bowling alley. Let's just say, I think I

should stick with golf unless if I want to score a flat zero on a game of bowling. However, bumpers are a different story. All in all, my second day of IJGA camp was a complete success, as I look forward to what the next day has in store for me.

Wednesday dawns on us, and shockingly enough, we are already halfway finished with camp. To mark the halfway point, we work on a little bit of everything from putting, all the way to full swing. To begin, we putt around for a few minutes and work our way up to chipping and pitching. Luckily, we practiced a lot of short game, which I needed the most practice with. A few hours on the driving range pass, and lunch time is upon us. Afterwards, we make our way to Rose Hill Golf Course, where we once again play guys versus girls closest to the hole (I won three up on my partner by the way and he wasn't too happy). This particular course had two practice holes for the public to play as they wish. Our opponents in the chipping closest to the hole contest then became our partners in a scramble against the other team. Though we may not have won, it was nice getting to know my partner more and exchange laughs while strategizing our shots. An overall nice way to put an end to golf for the day, and soon we make our way back to the complex for a quick Target run, dinner, and my favorite activity so far, the beach. Though we live in Florida and have the beach in every direction, it doesn't compare to going with your golf group to look around at shops and enjoy the evening with waves crashing. As we left the beach to go back to the housing, one of our camp members from Vietnam who hardly speaks english was left behind. As horrible as it sounds, hilariously enough, he returns half an hour later laughing at the fact that he got lost, just putting the cherry on top to conclude everyone's day.

Thursday soon comes upon us. Exhausted from the previous few days, I nearly overslept. Having only a few minutes to get ready and have breakfast, I make it to the bus shuttle with time to spare. As we arrive to the course, we grab our clubs from the lockers like every other day and made our way to the driving range for a couple hours of instruction and repetitive hitting. Eventually, we move onto bunker practice for assistance and evaluations. After nearly hitting a truck parked over by an electrical box for servicing, a shaky "Fore" comes out of my mouth. Soon, we move onto putting for another set of evaluations and practice, until we make our way inside for lunch. Applying everything we have learned from the past few days, we play our last round of nine holes at Island West Golf Course in the blazing afternoon. With the weather not

nearly comparing to Florida's steam, it still cast its effect upon innocent golfers like ourselves. Another scramble guys versus girls, only this time, both coaches played, making our last round of IJGA golf even more enjoyable. Sweaty and returned back to the housing complex, we ready ourselves for dinner and roller skating/laser tag. Once again, I guess I should stick with golf unless if I want to fall twice and hug the railing of the skating rink. Proving the fact that I can't skate made the night even funnier, along with my favorite, laser tag. Making it back to the housing just before curfew, everyone readies themselves for the final day of camp tomorrow.

Slowly opening my eyes to the sound of my alarm once again, I become saddened to find out that the last day of IJGA was upon me. Ready myself for the day as usual and arriving at the course stayed the same despite the fact that today was given an added twist. Everything we had learned was evaluated, and in the end, whoever had the most points from the day would be labeled first or second along with a prize. Starting out with pitching, all seven of us in my group hit six shots. While I was on my last shot, I chipped in to give myself a score of twenty-six and reaching the highest score in my group. Afterwards, we moved on to putting, where my partner and I would play nine holes around the green until we got the ball in the hole in the least amount of strokes. Then, we moved onto chipping and nearly holing one out again, my shot lipped out. Full swing followed after, and we were required to hit four shots. A seventy yard shot, one hundred yard shot, one hundred and thirty yard shot, and a driver shot. My first two shots were not what I had expected or wished for, but my last two shots made up for it. After everyone hit their shots, lunch was given out, and as this was our last lunch at IJGA. To finish off the day, we returned to the Performance Center for more swing perfecting and working out. After a few hours of working at my swing over and over again, I finally got the results I was hoping for, and putting a great end to my IJGA experience. We returned to Pinecrest for the overall winners and awards to first place and runner up winners of the girls and boys divisions. After congratulating my teammates and the winners, we decided to take pictures to remember each other by. At least it wasn't time to say our goodbyes yet, but it was time to thank my coaches for everything they had done for me within the past week. We made our way back to the housing complex for dinner and the final beach run. Spending the last day with my newly made friends made the whole trip worthwhile, for I wouldn't have been able to get through the week without them. After returning

back to the housing complex once again, my friends decided to say their goodbyes that night since they would not see me the next morning. We all agreed to not say “goodbye”, but rather, “see you later”, in hope that one day we may meet again.

Without speech and holding back the tears as I wish my IJGA camp friends the best, we depart from each other. With as little as a wave goodbye, I hope to one day reunite with my long distance companions in this small world. One of the easiest things to say “hello” and one of the most difficult things to say “so long friend” I have ever done. Knowing that the separation from each other may be forever remains heartbreaking, despite the joy that this camp has brought about overall. I have truly been changed throughout this experience, and I always will be forever. Thank you.