

2021 NIAAA SCHOLAR ESSAY MALE RECIPIENT
KENNETH RIX, JR. – PILGRIM HIGH SCHOOL
WARWICK, RHODE ISLAND



There is a quote "you never know how important something is until it is taken away." In the summer of 2019, I learned how much I valued playing High School sports when it was almost permanently taken away from the students in Warwick.

I have been incredibly fortunate to have played multiple sports since the age of 3. I moved from season to season of Soccer, Basketball and Baseball, making lifelong friends and travelling all through the United States. As a 12 year old my little league team played in the LLWS. I was a pitcher and third basemen on Team New England playing in Williamsport, PA. I was literally living all of my dreams through athletics and could not wait for high school! I set goals for myself and I was so happy that I achieved them. I made Varsity on a D1 Baseball team my

freshman year, won a State Championship as a Varsity Defensive back on my soccer team my sophomore year and was the leading scorer on my Varsity Basketball team as a sophomore as well. I was loving playing sports and representing my school and my community. The summer before my junior year I was already looking forward to what great things would come in the following year from Soccer, Basketball and Baseball. Little did I know what was about to happen.

In June of 2019 Warwick student athletes were informed of a last minute emergency school committee budget meeting. The Warwick School Committee was in financial trouble and was out of money. The City had level funded the School Department for years and it was "time to pay the piper." Basically anything that was deemed "extra" or "not essential" was being cut. Sports were on the chopping block and the unthinkable became reality. At first we thought these were just rumors until it became fact and the School Committee voted to cancel all athletics for the 2019/2020 year. My hopes for my Junior year of athletics crashed to halt.

As I tried to process the news, I realized that there was no way we could let this happen. Sports have impacted my life in such a positive way I knew that I had to work to save them, I immediately contacted every teammate from all of my teams and we put the word out to everyone who played a sport in Warwick. We joined forces with our city rival, Tollgate (the same teams and players I had battled against in every sport were now standing next to me at meetings with signs demanding they restore sports.) Cutting sports in Warwick had actually unified the city's athletes like nothing else have ever done before. Our goal was to let the adults making these decisions know that Athletics are 100 percent essential; physically and mentally. Hundreds of us went to City Hall and spoke at all of the School Committee meetings, giving examples of how important athletics were to us, our schools and our communities. We wrote letters, emails and got parents and local politicians involved. For two months we applied the pressure to the City Council and the School committee to find money to make this happen. Instead of attending Captain's practices for soccer that summer I was meeting teammates at City Council meetings and training on my own in hopes something would change. Finally, in September the City Council voted 4-1 to give money to the School Committee for Athletics!

This fall I committed to play Baseball at Hamilton College, a small Ivy League school in New York. Throughout the recruiting process I talked to many different coaches who all said they had such respect for multiple sport athletes. I thought back to 2019 & how I almost did not have that opportunity. Playing sports have positively impacted my life; for that I am eternally grateful.