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CD Anne Svec Merit Award Essay

What Does Sokol Mean to Me?

My Sokol journey as a student began as a Tot with no prior gymnastics experience and grew into a varsity-level athlete with numerous Sokol medals earned over the years. I later became a coach in my unit, where I continued to learn and grow through each experience. What Sokol means to me is growth. For the past 16 years, Sokol has provided many opportunities to build skills and gain knowledge that have helped me grow as an athlete and coach.

As a student at Sokol, I was exposed to many ways to grow physically — through gymnastics, calisthenics, marching, special numbers, track and field, fitness challenges, and rhythmic. Participating in all these activities helped develop coordination, strength, discipline, and confidence through constant repetition and valuable feedback from my coaches. I also learned how to be a supportive teammate by encouraging others when they tried something new. As I got older, I started to grow as a leader within my unit by setting an example for younger students to follow. This growth continued when I attended Instructor's School, where I learned how to lead others in group competitions. I discovered that effective leadership means being open to others' ideas and recognizing which ones work best. In my final year as a student, I became a stronger athlete and gained a deeper understanding of the importance of continuing my leadership journey.

When I started coaching 1st class girls, I realized how much my skills had grown from Instructor's School and helping with Tots and the Special Needs class, but I recognized there was still more to learn to become a better coach. Over the last 2 years, I have learned different coaching methods to help my students progress through skills efficiently, understand my feedback, and visualize what I expect through demonstrations. I have figured out ways to adapt when challenges arise during practice, such as taking in more students when a coach is absent, communicating across language barriers, or coaching in an area with limited space. Coaching girls with different skill levels has taught me how to accommodate each athlete's needs by modifying stations and offering individualized feedback.

Although I will be away for college, I still plan on assisting the coaches at my unit during my breaks because I want to support the organization that helped me grow into the person I am today. I also look forward to seeing how much my students grow while I am gone. After college, I hope to return to coaching at my unit. If I cannot be a full-time coach, I can still help whenever I can. Staying connected to the Sokol community allows me to give back and inspire younger members to take advantage of everything the program has to offer, just as I did.

As a student and coach, Sokol has offered me many experiences promoting continuous physical and mental growth. From a young age, I had chances to improve my skills through gymnastics, calisthenics, and other activities within the organization. As I grew older, I developed leadership and coaching abilities through Instructor's School. Since becoming a coach, I have continued to grow my skills with every practice. Sokol has taught me that real growth takes time — mistakes are part of the journey, but the effort is always worth it. I am forever grateful for what Sokol has taught me. The skills I have gained have shaped other parts of my life, and I would not be where I am today without Sokol.



