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**COVID-19**

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To say that COVID-19 has changed my life tremendously is both true for everyone in the world, and a severe understatement. Living through this global pandemic has changed a lot about my life, both for the good and the bad. I was four games through my senior baseball season at Heritage High School when we were sent home from school, and we all thought we would be back in two weeks. I then had to adapt to the new style of life- online classes, staying at home with my family, no sports to play or watch, and trying to stay safe amongst a pandemic. While adjusting to life at home and online, I had to make a decision that would change the path of my life forever- where I would attend college. Graduation was also coming up soon, would I have an in-person ceremony? Would I be able to see anyone from my high school again before we go to college? I was missing out on important parts of my life, but I had to keep my future in mind. Fast-forward a few months, and I am moving into dorm room at East Carolina, with completely different sets of rules than ever before.

Sports are some of the most important things in my life. I had been playing baseball and basketball since the time I could walk and watching on TV or in person most of the rest of the time. My family and I bonded over watching sports, playing sports together, and attending sporting events. I played my first organized baseball game when I was 4 years old, played travel baseball from the ages of 10-17, played for my middle school team, and 4 years for my high school team. My high school baseball team had made a run into the fourth round of the NCHSAA state playoffs in 2019 and were prepared for another big season in 2020. We started the season with two scrimmage wins, and three straight to begin the season. March 12th was the day of our fourth, and my final organized baseball game ever. The entire day was a whirlwind, and we were informed that sports would be paused for a month. I began to realize after some time passed that I would not be putting on a Heritage High School uniform ever again. Professional and Collegiate athletics were also put on pause, and one of the only things that had been consistent throughout my whole life was gone. Most of my favorite memories and best friendships revolved around high school sports; I was going to miss high school sports more than anything about my entire high school experience. To keep up my passion for sports, especially baseball, I obtained a position working for the East Carolina baseball program as a Student Manager, which I started in the fall.

Spending quality time with my family is one of the best things that COVID has brought me. My family and I are very close and spend as much time together as possible. My older brother is 5 years older than me and is in graduate school in Mississippi. My brother came home from school and was able to stay all the way through the summer. My family and I created a lot of memories that I will remember forever during our time at home together. We took many walks with our black lab, Sheriff, made home made ice cream every Sunday, did more yard work than you could imagine, took a vacation to the mountains and the beach of North Carolina, and plenty of other family activities. I will always cherish the time that the Austin family spent together during the pandemic and will never forget the memories we created together.

In conclusion the COVID-19 pandemic has changed my life in many different ways- some good, some bad. Graduating high school through the pandemic, losing my final season of baseball, and missing out on creating memories with my classmates impacted me the most in a negative way. It did not seem fair, and definitely caused some frustration and anger in my life. On the other hand, I would not have been able to spend so much quality time with my closest friends and family over the spring and summer of 2020- a time in my life that I, and the rest of the world will never forget.