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## REBOUNDED ACADEMICALLY

BY STEVE MOSCO

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When JeSen DeChalus failed a regents exam last January, he thought the best course of action would be to quit basketball and focus entirely on school. However, before making his decision final, DeChalus' coach convinced him to play one more game.

"That day, I ended up having my best game and scoring the most points I have ever scored," said DeChalus. "I learned that sports can be a great outlet and I also learned not to make decisions too quickly."

DeChalus, 18, is a three-sport athlete at Lowell High School in Flushing and a shining example of a well-rounded kid. His mid-nineties average puts him near the top of his class and his affinity for math has him on the fast track to endless possibilities in college and career.

"Achieving balance in school and sports is difficult, but it's necessary," he said. "There is some planning involved, but eventually you just get into a routine and start doing it without even realizing."

However, DeChalus' routine is anything but when you consider how most teens his age spend their time. Instead of playing video games, DeChalus is ensconced in the unlikely combination of math and sports. Besides basketball, he's the centerfielder with Lowell's baseball team and he figures to play with the school's newly-minted soccer team this fall.

DeChalus credits his mother with forging in him a solid foundation of responsibility and accountability, which ensures that, no matter the challenge, he finishes the task at hand.

"My mother is with me no matter what I choose," he said. "She loves that I'm so well-rounded."

This jack-of-all-trades approach does not surprise DeChalus' coach, Mitch Pruzan, who believes the senior-to-be possesses the focus and drive necessary for success in multiple sports, academics and his future career.

"I know how serious of a student and athlete JeSen is," said Pruzan. "No matter what sport he's playing and no matter what subject he's learning, he always gives 100 percent."

Pruzan has witnessed DeChalus' commitment firsthand, coaching him in baseball, basketball and, this fall, soccer. According to Pruzan, DeChalus has a built-in capacity to lead in each one of the sports he plays; providing he believes in his own ability to carry a team.

"I know what kind of leader he can be on and off the field," he said. "He says he's not competitive, but don't believe that. Trust me, he loves to win."

DeChalus acknowledges, in a soft spoken way, that when called upon he tries to rally his teammates when their slumped shoulders indicate they might be losing their competitive fire.

"I try to encourage my team-

mates and get their spirits up by shouting at them from the bench," he said. "People need someone to look up to, like a mother or a father figure. But it's easier to relate to someone when they are your age."

Relating to his classmates is something that DeChalus does with ease. He likes to socialize with people from all walks of life and doesn't believe in adhering to the standard high school clique scene. Yet, he's aware of the dangers inherent in having a wide range of friends and makes sure to divide his time wisely without sacrificing academics.

"When you're really good in sports, it makes you more popular and gives you more of a social life," he said. "I try to associate myself with everyone, but your friends have to know that sometimes you just can't hang out. You have to do what is necessary."

A dire necessity for DeChalus is his need to know and experience as many new people as is possible. He thirsts for travel and will have his chance next year when Lowell stages its first junior/senior trip to London during spring break.

DeChalus expects the trip will expand his worldview and enlighten him to the many different methods in which people live their lives. It's a journey he's eager to add to an ever-growing catalog of experiences; and deciding to embark is one decision that has not required much mulling.

"It's good to have lots of different experiences," he said. "That's why I play lots of sports; the same old routine can get boring."

JeSen DeChalus, 18, is a three-sport athlete at Lowell High School

THE COURIER/Photo by Steve Mosco

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