

# The Misread Playbook

## Part 1: The False Start

I am 19 years old. I am an athlete—a badminton player. My life is defined by high-speed rallies, lateral agility, and the explosive power needed to command the court. I deal in performance, split-second reactions, and the belief that if you push through the resistance, you win. On paper, I am the picture of collegiate ambition, balancing a 3.8 GPA and university-level status with a grueling training schedule.

But for four years, I have been competing against an opponent I couldn't see. It started when I was 15 with a bone-deep exhaustion that no amount of sleep could fix, and headaches that felt like permanent atmospheric pressure. My muscles and joints didn't just ache from the intensity of the court; they burned so badly I couldn't sleep.

I sought out the "coaches" of medicine. I went through years of blood tests and physical therapy sessions. I was met with the typical shorthand for a young female athlete. I was told I had "loose joints" and polycystic ovarian syndrome. When I told the physical therapist that my joints were failing during lunges, he told me I simply lacked the muscle to support them. I knew that was a miscalculation. I had been intentionally building that strength for four years.

The message from the sidelines was clear: You're just a student overworking yourself. You're just a girl with "growing pains." For four long years, the people who were supposed to have the answers told me my struggle "isn't that bad." You start to feel like an outsider in your own life. You don't feel normal; you just feel unheard.

## Part 2: The Positive Result

The turning point finally came when one doctor looked past the "athlete" label and saw the systemic signatures of a deeper conflict. They ran a test for something I had never heard of: Lupus.

When the results came back positive, the playbook changed instantly. I wasn't just "deconditioned" or "loose-jointed." My own immune system had been running a blitz against my healthy tissue. The fatigue that kept me awake at night in agony wasn't a lack of discipline; it was a biological war.

The realization hit me with a chilling weight: **"If we hadn't identified this inflammatory surge now, you would have kept pushing until the damage was irreversible."**

## Part 3: Drafting a New Strategy

The diagnosis was terrifying, but it was also a form of permission. It gave me the data I needed to stop "ignoring" the pain and start managing it. I am still a student, and I am still an athlete, but I am moving forward with a new set of rules.

I'm sharing this because being on the court taught me that you can't win a game if you're reading the wrong map. My strength and my GPA didn't protect me from being misread by a system for four years—a system that often mistakes a high-achiever's resilience for a lack of severity.

If you are a student, an athlete, or just a young person being told that your "daily struggle" is just a phase, I need you to hear this: Your pain is not a performance.

- **Trust your internal stats:** You are the only one who knows the difference between "post-match soreness" and "systemic failure."
- **Challenge the "Expert" opinion:** If a specialist tells you that you just need more muscle after you've spent years training, find a new coach who listens to your history.
- **Never accept "It's not that bad" as a diagnosis:** Only you know the mental and physical cost of making it through the day.

I may take more medicine than the average 19-year-old, and I may not feel "normal," but I am finally playing on a level field. I am meant for bigger and better things, and now I finally have the right playbook to get there.