



# Make a Difference

By  
Madison Dee Hahler

**L**AST YEAR at my school, I was appalled at the actions of my peers. I was managing the boys' basketball team. I learned a lot and tried my hardest to do well for them, but soon enough, I learned that the team members really did not care as much as I had expected them to. They had begun chewing tobacco during the season. As a girl, I find chewing utterly disgusting and I advised them all against it, but they failed to adhere. Early in the season, boys began getting caught for chewing, but minimal punishment was given to them. The boys who were in trouble still were able to play during the games, attend practice, and ultimately be a member of the team. This, to me, was unfathomable. We were always taught throughout elementary and junior high that you would be punished if you abused drugs, especially as a member of athletics. Most abusers were much too young to be chewing, not to mention that I was under the impression that it was banned during the sport season.

I remember on one bus ride home from an away game, the boys in the

back of the bus seemed too quiet. Upon exiting the bus, I thought I noticed something in one of the guy's bottom lip. I pushed past this ugly visual and tried to ignore it, not wanting to be a tattletail. Later that week, I learned that many boys were chewing tobacco in the bus that night on the way home from a game. As disappointment flooded me, I realized that these boys must have a serious problem.

As the season progressed more and more people, including spectators and parents, knew that the boys on the basketball team were avid "chewers." Many parents would become angry or complain if their son, who was blatantly caught chewing, was unable to play during the game. I feel that this is a main reason that the coaches and administrators failed to follow through with any serious punishments.

At one away game, it was said that the boys left a can of chew in the locker room they had gotten ready in. Their superintendent called our school and reported this, with the evidence in hand. The boys on our basketball team claimed that no one who chews would

be belligerent enough to forget their chew in there and that surely a boy from the other team had left it there so that our boys would get into trouble. I felt that they had broken their trust with me and I refused to believe them.

After basketball season, I was nominated as a student representative to help rewrite the drug policy for our school. I jumped at this opportunity, because I finally thought I could let out my aggression against the minimal punishments the abusers had received. Upon entering the first meeting, I was happily surprised to see that many teachers and parents were involved as well. Soon after I sat down, the basketball coach stepped into the room. I was a little uncomfortable, at first, to speak about how the boys had not received a very harsh punishment, because I felt that ultimately it was the coach who had failed to follow through with a punishment. Luckily, one of the parents had brought up the subject instead, and I simply added my witness statements.

By the end of weeks of many meetings, we, as a committee, had rewritten the drug policy. We had created a new three strike system, in which the punishment increased with repetition. This system will hopefully, create a better view of what's to come for tobacco (or any other drug) abusers. The new policy is specific and written in a way that students and parents should easily comprehend. I was extremely satisfied with our collaboration and pleased that I will leave my mark on our education system in such a significant way. 🙏

## ALERT SCHOLARSHIP

Madison Dee Hahler is a high school senior from South Dakota. *Alert Magazine* congratulates her for winning the Alert Scholarship and we encourage her in the pursuit of her academic goals. We would also like to encourage future seniors to participate in our scholarship program.