

Acceptance Speech, Dr. Jack Kennedy Award, McMaster University, 29 November 2019
Anand Sergeant, Marauder Scholar (Soccer)

I want to start by saying thank you to a few people. Thank you to the department and Claire for this award, it is a big honour for me to accept this. Even though this award is given to an individual, in reality I think this is really a team award and a group effort, so I'm proud to be able to share this award with my teammates and coaches. I'm proud of the culture of academic achievement and commitment that we have developed together, and I hope we can continue to grow that in the coming years. I want to thank my family who are here today for all the support and sacrifice they have given me to allow me the opportunity to play at the university level. I also want to recognize my program, Arts and Science, and our director Dr. Jean Wilson. I'm grateful for choosing such an unbelievable program, and I am happy to be able to share this award with you. Lastly I just want to recognize all of the student-athletes in this room today, and the community of student-athletes at McMaster for all of the hard-work you put in on and off the field, often work that goes unnoticed. I'm grateful to be peers with, and a part of such an amazing community of people.

Being a Marauder has meant many things to me in my years at McMaster so far, but today I just want to speak to three words: "pride, family, and sacrifice."

As someone who grew up in Hamilton, and whose parents both went to McMaster, my experience of wearing the Marauder logo and representing McMaster on the soccer field has filled me with pride. The ability to represent McMaster University—a school that stands for important values such as diversity, sustainability, and critical thinking—is something that we're all extremely lucky to do. Being a Marauder means recognizing that it is not just your team that you are playing for and representing, but rather an entire community and university that conducts itself with passion, integrity, and a positive attitude. When I am wearing my McMaster gear upon arriving at other universities, or in the community, I am proud to be representing a school that emphasizes these values. McMaster student-athletes are some of the most involved within their communities, and I am proud to be a part of this culture.

This brings me to how becoming a McMaster Marauder means joining a family; a community of people all committed to success both on and off the field of play. It is the collective effort and support of this community that gets us through the cold and rainy nights of November out on the field, and through the ups and downs of each season. Having a community of teammates and athletes from other sports who I can share similar experiences with has meant a lot to me while navigating the difficult moments of the school year. In my few years on the soccer team, I am proud to have been welcomed into—and further develop—a culture of respect and inclusivity. While part of this culture involves consistently working together to collect and manage equipment and support each other on the field, this family culture also manifests itself in other ways: for instance, sharing textbooks, mentoring younger team members academically, or engaging in community work such as volunteering for local tournaments. In my second year, last year, we lost our assistant coach Joe Valvasori to cancer. Joe was a man who was a constant positive energy, a friend to everyone, and a central part of our family. Losing Joe illuminated to me the importance of having this community of support; everyone involved with the team had to work together to fulfill the tireless work that coach Joe put into the team, and try to continue his legacy of love and respect.

The Marauder family extends far past those directly around me, however. My experience as a Marauder has allowed me to meet and engage with many student therapists, physios, doctors, administration, and coaches. These are the people behind the scenes that allow us to compete and ensure that McMaster

student-athletes are able to succeed in their sports, their communities, and their classrooms. The marauder experience has allowed me to become a part of this family, which has meant a lot to me during my undergraduate career.

Finally, as a student-athlete, I have learned that to play the sport I love while navigating the academic loads of a rigorous program, sacrifice is inevitable. The Marauder experience has taught me how to live a balanced life and learn how to—amidst a time-consuming season—manage schoolwork, and leave time for my family, my friends, and my own mental health. Part of this has meant sacrificing some social or family events, and sometimes academic opportunities. But I remind myself every day how privileged I am to be a Marauder, and play the sport I love while getting a great education. I also remind myself of how much others have sacrificed in my life to allow me to represent my school on and off the field. In the end, it has been more than worth it.