

Principal Glenz, Superintendent Erlandson, Members of the School Board; Faculty; Alumni; Parents; Guests; and fellow members of the graduating Class of 2020.

Many of us came into the world around the time of the September 11th terrorist attacks, and we now find ourselves graduating during a global pandemic. Seems fitting. “Resilience” has been part of our vocabulary for our entire lives.

My name is Logan Starkey and I think we can all agree that these are very strange times we are graduating in. Who would have thought we would be graduating today via a Zoom call? Who would have thought a hockey player would have been chosen to speak at graduation?

Yes, I am a hockey player, which is what brought me to online school in the first place. So, get ready for a lot of hockey stories. My teachers have been bombarded with them for the past 3 years!

Wayne Gretzky famously said, “you miss 100% of the shots you don’t take”. This was my mentality when faced with another year of Bantam hockey and then playing for a high school program that has never won a playoff game in school history. This is the normal path a Minnesota hockey player follows – youth hockey to high school hockey. Minnesota high school hockey is nearly a religion in this state. However, I have always been one to “march to the beat of my own drum” as they say. I have never cared much what other people think of me or my choices. Instead, I jumped off of the traditional, expected hockey path to take a **shot** at becoming a Juniors hockey player.

For those that may not know, Juniors hockey is typically played after high school and before college. Many high school hockey players play Juniors hockey for a few years after graduating to get the attention of college hockey coaches and get a shot at being recruited to play college hockey. It’s a tough path to climb. Juniors hockey is a brutal sport at times with bloody fights, physicality, strength and speed most high school aged

players are not equipped with. I was going after this dream at the young age of 15! Let me assure you, this was not an easy feat and quite unconventional in Minnesota. My family heard from many in the hockey community that we were crazy for pursuing this path at such a young age.

I spent my Sophomore year working on my skills, skating with various practice teams rather than playing my final year of Bantam hockey. At age 15 I tried out for a local Juniors team for the experience of trying out and to my family's surprise, I made the team. I was handed a contract and a month after I turned 16 I was playing against guys 18, 19 and 20 years old. I was a pretty skinny guy back then, so I had my world rocked a few times on the ice by some rather large players. In one memorable instance, during a playoff game faceoff, a grizzly looking opponent asked me where my play off beard was. I smartly said, "dude, I'm only 16, I can't grow one yet". I experienced my fair share of injuries too, head and shoulders but not knees or toes, and at times we were all questioning the decision to skip ahead a few years.

When I made the decision three years ago to step out of traditional seat-based public high school so I could achieve my dream of playing Juniors hockey, I knew there were memorable high school experiences I would be giving up. Homecoming dances, Friday night football games, proms, friends and playing high school hockey. But beyond hockey considerations, there were other reasons I made the decision to pursue my education online. All of you out there had your own reasons for choosing to go online too. High school halls can be rough, even for jocks, preps, and popular kids. I won't tell you I had it super rough, because some had it rougher, but like many kids in high school I put up with my fair share of bullying, hazing, and teasing. However, the hockey goals I set for myself outweighed my fear of missing out and pushed me to make the jump to the online format. I ignored any fear, anxiety, and naysayers and chose to finish my high school education at Minnesota Virtual High School.

I am very happy that I took the **shot** that was presented to me. Has it been perfect – nope! Not even close. I struggled tremendously the first year at

Virtual. I struggled to understand the format and expectations of online school. By the 2nd year I had finally figured out the cadence and expectations of online school, but I was so wiped from the increased pace of Juniors hockey practices and dryland strength training I wasn't doing as well as I knew I could. I was sleeping a lot, when I should have been doing more school assignments! At the beginning of my Senior year, I experienced a traumatic head injury during practice that nearly caused me to quit the sport. This impacted my ability to complete assignments, but I slowly healed and made the very difficult decision to switch leagues and teams for my physical and mental health.

My saving grace through all these challenges were the teachers at Virtual; or as I like to think of them, my coaches, and at times referees. Every teacher I ever had over these past 3 years was interested in me as a person. They were interested in learning about my hockey career, even coming to my games to show their support! They were fair, flexible, and firm allowing me to work late at night after a full day of hockey. They let me write assignments about what I knew – hockey. I felt fully supported throughout my entire high school experience. Sometimes I received a friendly check-in, sometimes a firm nudge and sometimes a stern coaching of “get your butt in gear” message. I appreciated every single message because it demonstrated a personal care level you don’t always get in traditional public school.

So here we are, on the verge of becoming high school graduates. It’s the final seconds of this last game in the series. Now is the time that our resilience will be tested again. Some of us will head off to college, others to trade school, military or straight to work. Some might take a gap year or have no idea what’s next. I’ll be headed off to find my next “**shot**” within the Juniors hockey ranks with hopes of being recruited to play hockey in college while I pursue a degree. I don’t know where or when that will be yet, but that’s ok. I’m not worried, and neither should you be. We are ready to handle whatever **shots** and opportunities come our way. We have been prepared for this. We have been born for this.

Graduating class of 2020, I will leave you with this final hockey quote from the Great One, who also said, "I skate to where the puck is going to be, not to where it has been". Let's skate forward to where our future will be, appreciate where we have been, the struggles we have endured, lessons we have learned along the way and embrace the next period in the game of life!