*Time stops when my foot captures the ball. In that split second, the defender and I make eye contact, and I know exactly what I have to do. My opponent swiftly shifts his gaze to the ball, and I look at his body to prepare my next move. Using my speed as an asset, I maneuver a handful of step-overs, a body fake, and take the ball down the line towards the goal. My team is relying on me and I am determined to not let them down. My career as a soccer player began when I was just a few years old. In my Mexican household, soccer is a staple and equally as essential as attending mass on Sundays. I quickly developed a love for the game and relished in the opportunity to help lead my team towards success. When I am on the field, the focus is not on how much money our parents have in their bank account or the fact that I require a scholarship to remain on the team but instead on our skill and passion for the game. The sport has provided me a space of belonging – an equal playing field where prejudice and differing beliefs are pushed aside for the sake of the team’s success. My diligent work ethic and competitive nature as an athlete is modeled after my undocumented parents. Witnessing the selflessness and tenacity my parents exude every day tackling their ten-hour landscaping and hotel maid’s service jobs fills me with great appreciation and gratitude. My parents have persevered and willingly accepted any job, no matter how challenging, to sustain our small family. The hard labor they endure, that is often overlooked by my more affluent classmates and teammates is my drive to make something meaningful out of myself and take advantage of the educational opportunities at my disposal. I have pushed myself to successfully maintain a high G.P.A throughout my entire high-school career while balancing a part-time job and all my extracurriculars. Furthermore, I invested my time and efforts in non-profit organizations, like Reality Changers and AVID, that encouraged my ambition and provided academic assistance on my path to a better future.*

*As I take my final steps out of high school and the fields I’ve grown to call home, my parents’ sacrifices are at the forefront of my mind. Being raised in a low-income household to immigrant parents motivated me to develop a resilient mindset and work tirelessly until I achieve my intended goal of graduating from a four-year university despite the obstacles that present themselves. I owe it to myself and to my family to keep my focus on acquiring a college education so I can personally expand my own horizons, and ultimately, help elevate my family in the process. Higher education will open doors and resources for me that my parents could never reach, and ultimately save me from becoming what society expects of Latino males – high school dropouts, jail inmates, drug addicts, gang members, or simply employees working at a burger joint for the rest of their life. I seek to inspire the younger kids in my community to realize that our lives are more than those stereotypes and that we are capable of acquiring success if we have the will and dedicate the time and energy. I am proud to be a first-generation college student and help break the cycle of poverty in my family. I don’t know if I will ever be able to repay my parents for the sacrifices they’ve made but bringing home a college acceptance and graduate diploma will be the perfect first step in the biggest game of my life.*