

## **During coronavirus pandemic, the Class of 2020 matures**

By Julie Heng

The realities of the coronavirus have set in for many Michiganders. A stay-at-home order and a rising number of deaths make for unsettling headlines every day.

In this crisis, high school seniors are rightly staying home to help stop the spread of COVID-19 in our communities. In less than a month, we have gone from looking forward to prom and graduation to wondering if we'll experience these common rites of passage at all.

We're not complaining. Many of us know that the loss of these moments is a small sacrifice to stop the sickness and deaths that the coronavirus has already caused around the world. But as we cope with this constant, unshakable sense of uncertainty, it's worth recognizing the moments and opportunities that could have been for high school seniors across Michigan this year.

### **An unfinished championship**

For senior Torrance Henry Jr., this was the year Cass Tech's chess team would win the National High School Chess Championship. Last year, Cass Tech placed second in its division, the school's highest ranking ever. This season, Torrance's team had amped practices up to Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday after school.

"This is supposed to be the one that we won," said Torrance, who's played in more than 100 tournaments. In 2014, he was named the captain of the Detroit City Chess Club's Dream Team.

"I wanted to go in there and prove that I'm getting better," Torrance said. "Outdo everything I did before." But the championship tournament has been cancelled.

Torrance knew it was inevitable. "It just reminded me how fast it all moves," he said.

### **Completing a family**

Diamond Coleman had big plans for spring break: she was going to meet her half siblings for the first time in her life.

After her mom passed away when she was a baby, Diamond grew up an only child with her dad and two aunts. She finally found her half-siblings — three sisters and a brother — on Facebook two years ago. They live in Minnesota.

“I was supposed to meet them for my 18th birthday,” Diamond said. “I’ve never seen them, ever.”

The spring break trip Diamond anticipated so eagerly was a long time coming. She was going to bring home some of her mother’s ashes in a necklace. She was going to tell her siblings that she loves them. That after she started talking to them, she finally feels cared for. Wanted. Complete.

Her sister Unique was planning to come from Minnesota to her high school graduation. But graduation might not go as planned, either.

“All we can do is either be negative or be positive, but I feel like everybody should be positive,” Diamond said. “I’m just waiting it out. I’m just being patient and willing to listen.”

### **Finally made the team**

This year was also 18-year-old Haley Grooms’ last chance to make Utica High School’s varsity soccer team. Despite playing since elementary school, Haley was sidelined for several seasons because of injuries, surgery and recovery. She tore her right ACL in middle school, and her left ACL her junior year.

So this off-season, she gave it her all, running and strength conditioning every day after school. Her preparation paid off; on Thursday, March 12, she at last made varsity. The following day, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer ordered schools across the state to close.

“I didn't want my senior year to end up like that,” Haley said. “Nobody wants their senior year to end up like that.”

But for Michigan’s high school athletes, spring sports are unlikely. “If they do cancel, I'm going to be really, really upset for like a day or two," Haley said.. "And then I'll try and think positively. It's responsible. ... It's just part of being mature. Because, I admit, I've had to mature.”

### **A new defining moment**

It’s true: High school seniors have all had to mature during this stay-at-home order. We all had to accept, and learn and grow.

We understand that these times are unprecedented, and we know that humanity is larger than the moments we've been forced to forfeit.

But it’s worth remembering the moments we looked forward to, the ones we may never experience. Whenever people say that high school is the best time of our lives, these are the moments they cite — the spring break trips, the parties, the championships.

For Rebekah Arcilla from Plymouth High School, it’s her debut, a fairytale-like Filipino coming-of-age ceremony she’s planned since November (and dreamed about since she was eight). For Rishy Peela from Troy High School, it’s a shot at winning the National Quiz Bowl competition his team qualified for. And for Joselen Fielder from Grosse Pointe North High School, it’s her senior choir solo performance – “I Have Nothing” by Whitney Houston.

Our world is changing. And as we graduate into the next chapter of our lives, the Class of 2020 is changing, too. Our resilience and empathy will define us in the new moments we make.