

Feature Writing

Region Meet • 2018



You are a reporter for the Leaguetown **Press**, the student newspaper of Leaguetown High School.

From the given information, write a **feature story** as you would for the high school newspaper. You may use statements attributed to individuals as **direct or indirect quotes**. You may not change the meaning of a statement. You have **one hour**.

Do not write your name or the name of your school on this sheet or your entry. **Put your number (NOT YOUR NAME) on your paper.**

Leaguetown High School, located in Texas, has an enrollment of 700 students in grades 9-12. Junior Daria Bellum is the leading home run hitter and starting shortstop for the varsity softball team. So far this season, she has hit nine home runs. If she hits one more, she will break the school record for the most home runs in a season.

This summer, though, Daria's future with the softball team almost ended. In June, Daria was diagnosed with Wegener's Granulomatosis, a rare disorder that causes severe inflammation of the body's major organ systems — most commonly the lungs and kidneys. The disease can be fatal if not caught early. It took doctors a week to diagnose Daria, and the disease nearly cost Daria her life. Wegener's strikes children and adolescents at the rate of three per 100,000.

Daria's illness started in late May with chest pains. Despite several doctor visits where she was told she had a virus, Daria grew weaker. By June 1, she was unable to walk. Desperate for answers, her parents took her to the emergency room in Dallas, 90 miles from Leaguetown, where after multiple X-rays, CAT scans and biopsies, the doctors finally diagnosed the disease.

While battling the disease over the summer, Daria lost 25 pounds and 60 percent of her muscle tissue. Her doctors told her she would never play sports again.

In early September, the doctors said Daria was in remission and could return to school and begin her physical therapy. Daria continues to take various drugs to prevent a relapse. Determined to get back on the softball field, Daria took her physical therapy seriously and within a month had surpassed all her doctor's expectations. By her second month of physical therapy, Daria was jogging two miles after the hour-long sessions, something her doctors didn't think she would ever be able to do again. By January, when the softball team began practice, Daria said she felt 100 percent, and her doctors released her to play.

This Friday, the softball team will play Riverdale High School. When the team played Riverdale earlier in the season, Daria hit two home runs. You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed on Wednesday, April 18.

■ DARIA BELLUM, junior

"I don't like to be told that I can't do something. When the doctor told my parents and me that I wouldn't be able to play sports anymore, my mom cried. I told the doctor he was wrong. And he was. I am not going to say physical therapy and training was easy. It wasn't. There were many days when I doubted myself, and many days that I wanted to give up. I pushed myself so I could be on the field again. Ever since I was 5 years old and my mom took me to my cousin's high school softball game, I've wanted to be a softball player. I wasn't going to let this disease stop that dream.

"The first week at the hospital in Dallas is a blur. I was so weak that I wasn't

■ **DARIA BELLUM (continued)**

conscious for most of the testing, prodding and poking. In fact, my parents knew my diagnosis for about four days before I ever knew it. I was too out of it to understand. Finally, when the drugs started kicking in, the doctors gave me the grim news. At first, I was devastated. I thought I was going to die. People do die from this disease and, whether we wanted them or not, my doctor gave us all of the facts about this disease. I was really afraid. Then, the drugs starting working, and that first night when I started to feel like myself again, I said a prayer of gratitude and promised God and myself that I would try my hardest to be my best self. And my best self is a softball player. I started with being positive and believing in myself. I decided it would take something phenomenal to keep me from doing something I love, and this disease wasn't it.

"I am a bit nervous about the game on Friday. I feel like everyone is expecting me to hit a home run. I hope I do, but that's not my main goal. My goal is to play my best. If the home run happens, it happens. But it's more important that I am focused and I give 100 percent."

■ **DR. RAJ PATEL, Daria's doctor**

"I was reluctant to clear Daria to play. Even though Daria is in great shape, she's lucky. Her body responded to the drugs much quicker than most. She is still taking drugs to keep the disease in remission. The drugs she is on lower the count of the body's white blood cells, the cells that keep the immune system working. That makes her more vulnerable to infections and viruses. From a medical standpoint, I have concerns. If she's injured, the injury will likely be more severe because her immune system is compromised. Daria and her parents understand the risks, and I understand why she wants to play. I will be at the game on Friday. I am coming down from Dallas for it. If Daria breaks that home run record, I want to be there. Even if she doesn't, I want to see her play."

■ **EVE BELLUM, Daria's mother**

"June was probably the toughest month we've ever had. We thought we were going to lose our little girl. After the first round of tests in Dallas, the doctors were convinced Daria had cancer. I can't tell you how many tears we shed. Then, when we got the real diagnosis, it didn't sound much better. The doctors still were not convinced Daria would survive. My husband and I felt helpless — like there was nothing we could do. That's the worst feeling in the world.

"Daria is a fighter, though. We should have never doubted that she could beat this disease. The battle isn't over, but Daria will never give up. Watching her play softball isn't easy. I am always afraid she is going to get hurt. I can't let my fears deter Daria's dreams, so I let go and focus on her smile. She is always smiling when she plays softball. Some girls have serious game faces. Not Daria. Her game face is a glowing smile."

■ **AILENE MACURDY, varsity softball coach**

"When I visited Daria in the hospital and saw how weak and sick she was, I wasn't sure if we would ever see her on the softball field again. But Daria proved me wrong, and I am so glad she did. She is the rock of our team. Daria was a solid player last year, but she's even better this year. And it's not just her home run streak. She has not had a single error in the last seven games. I want Daria to hit a home run on Friday, but I'm not worried. If she doesn't hit it this week, she will do it before the season is over. No doubt."

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

If the girls' team beats Riverdale on Friday, it will be in first place in district. In the school's history, the team has never won the district championship.

DO NOT DISTRIBUTE TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING CONTEST!

REGION • 2018 FEATURE WRITING CONTEST TIPS AND SAMPLE STORY

Contest Director: Give one copy to each judge to use during critique/judging. Also, staple one copy of the contest and one copy of the contest tips to each student's returned entry. The purpose of the tips is to provide immediate feedback to students. However, it is not meant to replace written comments from the judge.

1. Figure out what the story is about and its theme or focus. This story is about a junior who recovered from a serious disease and may break the home run record.

2. The lead of a feature story must grab the reader's attention. It does not have to be a certain length or include the 5Ws and H. It should set a scene and get the reader into the story. Although you have freedom to describe the scene as you think it might have existed, try to stay as close to the copy as you can. Some judges will not want you to wander off the subject too much.

As the leading home run hitter for the varsity softball team, junior Daria Bellum has seen her fair share of curveballs.

But she was unprepared for the curveball life threw at her this summer.

"I thought I was going to die," Daria said. "I was really afraid."

In June, Daria was diagnosed with Wegener's Granulomatosis, a rare disorder that causes severe inflammation of the body's major organ systems. The disease can be fatal if not caught early.

Daria's body responded to the treatment, but the doctors told Daria she would never play sports again.

"I don't like to be told that I can't do something," Daria said.

The lead possibilities are endless.

3. Once you get past the lead, make sure you include a nut graph. It tells the reader what the story is going to be about. Follow the nut graph with a direct quote and then go into the transition/quote formula.

nut graph

After months of physical therapy and pushing herself, Daria proved the doctors wrong. She is now one home run away from breaking the school record for the most home runs in a season. The team plays Riverdale High School this Friday. If Daria hits a home run at the game, she will break the school record with 10 home runs.

direct quote

"I am not going to say physical therapy and training was easy," she said. "It wasn't. There were many days when I doubted myself, and many days that I wanted to give up."

4. After you get past the nut graph, the rest of the story can tell itself through the use of the transition/quote formula.

Be sure you attribute after the quote, or at least after the first sentence. An attribution should be: subject of attribution followed by the verb of attribution (“Daria said,” not “said Daria”). Don’t stack quotes. You need a transition sentence between direct quotes, and that transition sentence should provide facts or data. Also, make sure transitions do not repeat information told in a direct quote.

transition/story-telling

Daria’s illness started with chest pains in May. Doctors told her she had a virus, but Daria got weaker and weaker and within a week, she was unable to walk. Her parents rushed her to an emergency room in Dallas.

direct quote

“We thought we were going to lose our little girl,” Daria’s mother, Eve Bellum, said. “After the first round of tests in Dallas, the doctors were convinced Daria had cancer. Then, when we got the real diagnosis, it didn’t sound much better. The doctors were still not convinced Daria would survive.”

transition/story-telling

After Daria’s diagnosis was confirmed and the drugs started working, she started to feel like herself again.

direct quote

“I decided it would take something phenomenal to keep me from doing something I love, and this disease wasn’t it,” she said.

5. Always use third person. Don’t say “our student” or “our own Daria Bellum.” Also, do not editorialize. For instance, you should not say “She is an amazing person.” These statements are personal opinion and should not be made in a feature story.

6. Use the verb “said” as the verb of attribution unless you have a very good reason not to. For example, if someone asks something, use the verb “asked.” If someone added something, you could use “added.” Otherwise, use “said.”

7. Finally, look for a strong quote to use as a closing statement. It should give the reader a sense of satisfaction or resolution.

Daria admits she’d like to hit a home run on Friday, but that isn’t her main goal.

“My goal is to play my best,” she said. “If the home run happens, it happens. But it’s more important that I am focused and I give 100 percent.”

SAMPLE STORY

As the leading home run hitter for the varsity softball team, junior Daria Bellum has seen her fair share of curveballs.

But she was unprepared for the curveball life threw at her this summer.

“I thought I was going to die,” Daria said. “I was really afraid.”

In June, Daria was diagnosed with Wegener’s Granulomatosis, a rare disorder that causes severe inflammation of the body’s major organ systems. The disease can be fatal if not caught early.

Daria’s body responded to the treatment, but the doctors told Daria she would never play sports again.

“I don’t like to be told that I can’t do something,” Daria said. “I told the doctor he was wrong.”

After months of physical therapy and pushing herself, Daria proved that she was right. She is now one home run away from breaking the school record for the most home runs in a season. The team plays Riverdale High School this Friday. If Daria hits a home run at the game, she will break the school record with 10 home runs.

“I am not going to say the physical therapy and training was easy,” she said. “It wasn’t. There were many days when I doubted myself, and many days that I wanted to give up.”

Daria’s illness started with chest pains in May. Doctors told her she had a virus, but Daria got weaker and weaker and within a week, she was unable to walk. Her parents rushed her to an emergency room in Dallas.

“We thought we were going to lose our little girl,” Daria’s mother, Eve Bellum, said. “After the first round of tests in Dallas, the doctors were convinced Daria had cancer. Then, when we got the real diagnosis, it didn’t sound much better. The doctors were still not convinced Daria would survive.”

After Daria’s diagnosis was confirmed and the drugs started working, she started to feel like herself again.

“I decided it would take something phenomenal to keep me from doing something I love, and this disease wasn’t it,” she said.

In early September, the doctors said Daria was in remission and could return to school and begin physical therapy.

“I pushed myself so I could be on the field again,” she said. “Ever since I was 5 years old and my mom took me to my cousin’s high school softball game, I’ve wanted to be a softball player. I wasn’t going to let this disease stop that dream.”

In that vein, Daria took her physical therapy seriously and surpassed all of her doctor’s expectations. By January, Daria said she felt 100 percent.

“I was reluctant to clear Daria to play softball,” Daria’s doctor, Raj Patel, said. “Even though Daria is in great shape, she is still taking drugs to keep the disease in remission.”

The drugs Daria takes lower her white blood cell count, which keeps the immune system working. This makes her more vulnerable to infections and viruses.

“Daria and her parents understand the risks, and I understand why she wants to play,” Dr. Patel said. “I will be at the game on Friday night. If Daria breaks that home run record, I want to be there. Even if she doesn’t, I want to see her play.”

Varsity softball coach Ailene Macurdy says Daria, who is the starting shortstop on the team, is the “rock” of the team.

“Daria was a solid player last year, but she’s even better this year,” Macurdy said. “And it’s not just her home run streak. She has not had a single error in the last seven games.”

Daria admits she’d like to hit a home run on Friday, but that isn’t her main goal.

“My goal is to play my best,” she said. “If the home run happens, it happens. But it’s more important that I am focused and I give 100 percent.”