

## **Evan Kim, Senior**

**Hobbies:** Rubik's Cubes, Sliding tiles, Crosswords (and all their variations), Texnique, Poker, Basketball, Blogging, Consuming Korean BBQ, **Leg day**

**Clubs:** Physics Club, Math Club, Online Physics Olympiad, Science Bowl, Science Olympiad, Astronomy Club

**Experience:** US Physics Team (2021-23), USAPhO Gold (2021-23), IOAA Gold Medalist (2022), US IOAA Team (2022-23), Regeneron Science Talent Search Finalist (top 40) (2023), International Science and Engineering Fair (2022), NSB Nationals (2020, 2022-23), PUPC 4th Place Globally (2020), USNCO Nationals Qualifier (2023), Science Olympiad Nationals (2022)

### **Autobiography:**

*I've always been interested in physics, but in the past couple years, physics has become my life~*

Hahaha. That's such an idealized view of passion that that phrase, or variations of it (replace physics with any other interest: astronomy, math, etc.), has become somewhat of an inside joke among my schoolmates (it stemmed from a presentation in which my friend used that as an opening line, which we found hilarious). But the funny thing is, my autobiography from last year can probably be reduced to that sentence. I wrote about my initial amazement, my continued fascination, my wondrous exploration, and very little about the grind—when it felt like physics didn't love me back, when it was more about the progress than the physics.

I do indeed love physics very much. I love that it provides such exact, complete, and mathematical explanations about our world. Explanations that let you stare out the window, look at the rainbow (USAPhO 2022/A3!), and say, "I know why." From the firing of neurons (USAPhO 2019/B1!) to the shimmering colors on a CD, being able to draw a line of reasoning back to basic principles in physics is so inherently satisfying for me. This is *passion*. If it weren't for this inherent enjoyment I found, I wouldn't have been able to keep coming back and keep learning enough to get to this point.

But the other half of my journey was something different—it was *drive*. I remember sections of textbooks like Morin where I most definitely was not feeling that fire for physics burning in my chest. But I pushed through and read through the gritty details, chasing that punchline at the end of the section / chapter (e.g. angular momentum works!). And especially in the week or two before the USAPhO, this feeling of drive would take over. I would go through practice test after practice test in that period to make sure I was ready. And this behavior of course derived from the fact that the USAPhO is a *competition*, not from any inherent enjoyment of physics.

I mention this because I think this part of studying, especially in the context of academic competitions, is rarely talked about. In general, we like to present our journeys as neat and tidy and smooth-sailing—like my opening line—because that's a lot more aesthetically pleasing. But the reality is that physics *hasn't* become my life. I like to do other things as well (see my hobbies :P), and there are times when these other activities may be more appealing than physics. That's when the external motivation and drive kicks in—whether this stems from

wanting to make more progress and get to the next “level” of physics knowledge or from participating in the physics Olympiads.

I believe that these periods of externally motivated progress are necessary to get through periods of lulls in your passion and are also especially natural in the context of competitions. But at the same time, running on this sort of motivation for a long time is conducive to burnout, at least for me. And when burnout does occur for me, I always find it helpful to go back to where it started. I sit back, look at the physics I’ve learned in the last “grind”, and try to find the little things that connect to our real world (atmospheric physics from thermodynamics! Rings of Saturn from the tidal forces!). And as I do, I’m reminded of the little moments of discovery and awe throughout my life: watching my physics club advisor create sparks with steel balls on paper, my 6<sup>th</sup> grade science laser lab, and reading the Magic School Bus. These moments (*passion*) were what got me on physics in the first place, and it’s chasing those moments (*drive*) that have kept me around all these years. So, I guess to summarize, I’m just trying to say my journey with physics was a combination of passion and drive, and I think that’s OK—it doesn’t have to be a Romeo and Juliet story for you to do well at something.

Anyways, with all that being said, it’s really not that deep (bro)—I’m just excited to enjoy physics with 19 other nerds at camp!

*Inspired by Yuma Schuster’s “Is It Really Passion?”. For a more typical timeline of my journey, [see my autobiography from last year](#).*