

# *an* **INDEPENDENT** *journey*

by Morgan Collier



Hamza never thought he would have become a cheerleader. “Through the tryouts, the training and the performances, I have met so many new people,” he said. “It, honestly, makes life great to have these types of opportunities.”

As a coach for a gymnastics studio, Hamza says he has found great satisfaction and passion for helping people. “If I can help

somebody, I want to give my all to help that person out,” he said. “Nothing compares to being able to help someone achieve their goals.”

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**I**t isn’t easy moving halfway around the world to a brand-new place, being a foreigner with others seeing you as an outcast. Sophomore pre-med biology major Omar Hamza learned from an early age that some people might label him, but through hard work and determination, he would overcome the limitations others placed on him, a testament to his own independent spirit.

Hamza’s family moved from Syria to the U.S. when his father was 17. “My parents suffered tremendously when making the travel,” Hamza said.

As he grew up, people would tease him. He said some of his fellow students in high school would think it was funny to make terrorist jokes to him, but the older he got, the harder he worked. “I learned to brush them off since I know that anything they said didn’t represent me,” Hamza said. “That’s why I decided to graduate at the top of my class and excel in the sports and organizations I joined.”

Hamza graduated from Port Neches-Groves High School as valedictorian in 2016 and was honored to be named a Mirabeau Scholar. “I feel pretty accomplished when I look back to see how far I’ve come,” he said. “But in reality, there is still a long way to go. The difference is that I have great people surrounding me at LU who will not hesitate to stand up for me.”

During his freshman year at LU, Hamza aced his honors courses along with his higher-level biology classes, was a cheerleader for the LU cheer team, held a job at Full Effects Gymnastics in Port Arthur and made time for a work out regimen everyday.

“Having all of these experiences is making me into a very diverse person who can fit into many different shoes,” he said. “You see people who live a monotonous and redundant life everyday, and they are content with that, but I, personally, want to experience as much as possible.”

According to Hamza, all of these different opportunities have taught him a lot. “I have gained so much knowledge and experience from everybody I have worked with,” he said. “I believe that it makes me a better person, and it allows me to put myself in others’ shoes to empathize with a lot of people.”

Time management and prioritization play a huge role in his busy schedule, he says. “You can do so many different things that you never thought you could do all at once when you manage your time wisely,” Hamza said.

With no cheerleading background prior to the 2016-2017 school year,



to Hamza, he tries to see every day as a brand-new day to make himself a better person. “You can’t develop as an individual if you haven’t seen other stories from across the spectrum,” he said. “That is how you gain the most wisdom and knowledge.”

Hamza said he strives to make himself a type of role model that he once looked to when he was younger by being open to experiences beyond his comfort level. “Throughout my life, I have developed this pool of knowledge and wisdom that you can’t place a monetary value on,” he said. “It’s something you can’t buy or learn from watching a YouTube video; it is something you have to put yourself into.”

As a piece of advice to people who have gone through, or are going through, what he experienced growing up, Hamza said to persevere and pay no attention to negativity. “Treat everyone with kindness, especially those who refuse to give it to you,” he said. “Then excel at whatever you do to become an example in a powerful way.”