

Richard Yang

11th grade

Hobbies: Cello, piano, running, video games, reading

Clubs: Computer Science, Model Rocketry, Science Olympiad, Math Club

Contest Experience: Mathcounts Nationals Qualifier 2020-21, AIME 2020-24, NAC 2024

Bio:

Two years ago around April, my dad and I were talking about planning for tenth grade in the fall. When he urged me to have some goal for the year, I hurriedly said "math competitions." Then I hesitated a little. "...I also heard about this physics competition on AoPS. F equals ma?" I didn't even know what the USAPhO was yet.

Later that summer, I had a vague idea to start studying physics. I've loved astronomy and popular science books since I was a kid, and I had these bright and colorful images of black holes and rockets and airplanes in my head. So when my dad gave me an old textbook, skimming the first chapter on metric units and the SI system didn't enthuse me. Luckily, I found Kevin Zhou's advice some time later. I think it's the single most pivotal thing I've read. My copy of HRK arrived in September.

I took the AIME on February 7, 2023, and immediately I knew that I had no chance for JMO. I wasn't in a good state for the $F=ma$ two days later, fully expecting to fail. But reality decided to throw me a plot twist. When scores came back, I found out I'd scored 17, one below the cutoff.

I spent March sifting through all of my disappointment and regret. Sometime during that month, I told my friends that next year, I would qualify for the training camp; it would be my greatest redemption arc. Of course, life isn't a novel, and you can never guarantee success in olympiads. It wasn't anything but a foolish promise. But it got me to pick up HRK again.

When I came back, there was something in the pages that I'd glanced over earlier in the year, and it hooked me. I still don't know how best to describe it. There's just this deep satisfaction in seeing the world go from an inscrutable chaotic swirl to something knowable, one equation at a time. I chased that feeling every day, and I'd finished HRK by the end of July. Looking up from my notebook, I suddenly realized that making camp wasn't just a fantasy anymore. A lot of practice later, I was looking at the last six problems between me and my dream.

To the outside eye, it looks like my story played out perfectly. But qualifying was hardly a sure thing for me. In fact, I thought that all my work had barely fallen short. After reading the USAPhO solutions and counting my mistakes, I sat there and thought back to a question I'd asked myself a few months earlier. If, after all this work, I didn't achieve my dream, would it have been worth it? It's then that I realized that I had zero regrets about choosing to chase after physics. I can't imagine anything I would have done instead with all those hours.

Getting the camp email was the best surprise of my life, and I can't wait to meet everyone else there. Physics is great, but my happiest moments have been when I'm sharing it

with other people. I'd like to thank my physics teacher, Mr. Harding, and my friends and family. I couldn't have ever gotten this far without your support.