

**Jaewoo Jung**

Age: 16, Grade: 11

School Name: Loveless Academic Magnet Program (LAMP) High School, Montgomery, AL

Educator: Helen Lee

Category: Personal Essay & Memoir

---

## **Underdog's Miracle**

Have you seen Croatia's miracle run to the world cup final in 2018? Have you heard of FC Porto winning the Champions League in the 03-04 season or Leicester City winning the Premier League in the 2015/16 season? One similarity these teams share is that they are the underdogs. Underdogs are defined as teams or people who are less likely to win a match or a competition. Underdog teams tend to be smaller in size and make fewer profits than big teams. However, people tend to wish for their victories over big teams. So why do we cheer for them if they are not the strongest, most prosperous, or most popular team?

There is a psychology behind it called an "underdog effect.". Underdog effect makes a person unintentionally cheer for a weaker team who's more likely to lose. When an underdog makes unexpected results, our brain releases positive emotions from an unanticipated event. As a result, people seem to get more joy over the theatrical event than predicted.

Additionally, people are usually bored by a one-sided game. Fans would like to see an equal and intense game between the two teams. They enjoy close games where each player has to commit everything to that match. Therefore, people cheer for the underdog to come back against the more robust team when the match seems uneven.

This psychological reaction is also related to our current society. Our modern society is very competitive; therefore, people continuously compete to stand in a better position. Due to our contemporary society, we generally don't become winners all the time. Consequently, we consider ourselves as weaker sides and are more attracted to weaker teams who seem to be in similar circumstances.

As a football fan, I enjoy watching those dramatic moments in sports where the underdog defeats the favorites... In the 2018/19 UEFA Champions League season, my favorite team, Tottenham Hotspurs Football Club, were considered the underdogs in the knockout stages. In the quarter-final, we faced the previous season's English champion, Manchester City. All the fans thought Manchester City would reach the Semi-final as they were a fantastic team. However, I felt that we would lose since our star player Harry Kane was missing due to injury. However, we managed to get a 1-0 win at home with Son Heung Min's goal. After his goal, he ran up to the camera and shouted, "You know what? We're going to win!" All of the home fans cheered, and his face filled the front of England's newspaper that day.

In the Champions League, two teams face each other twice in both home and away games. Most football fans still expected Manchester City's home victory despite our victory at the Tottenham Hotspurs Stadium. Just like we expected, Manchester City's winger, Raheem Sterling, scored in the first 5 minutes of the game. However, Son Heung Min got two balls behind City's net immediately. The score was 3-1 aggregate. The game was intense. The score was 4-3, an aggregate score of 4-4 by the end of the game. If Manchester City doesn't score, then Tottenham Hotspurs advance with the away goal advantage. With just a few seconds remaining until the final whistle, Manchester City's Raheem Sterling scores his final goal, which will send them to the semi-final. However, within just a few seconds, the referee calls an offside foul with their Video Assistant Referee program and cancels the goal. The underdog had beaten the England Champion in one of the biggest football competitions.

Tottenham Hotspurs face Dutch League Champion Ajax in the semi-final of the same competition. In their first match, their star player Son Heung Min received a one-game suspension due to his 5th yellow card of the competition received from his previous game. They conceded one goal, and they lost at home with a score of 1-0. In the first half of our second game, we conceded two extra goals and an aggregate score of 3-0. We needed three more goals to reach the final. At the beginning of the 2nd half, our manager Mauricio Pochettino changed his tactic to play more aggressively. Lucas Moura, a Brazilian winger, considered a rotation player, scored two goals within the first 15 minutes. Both fans were cheering, and the heat became hotter. However, Tottenham Hotspurs still needed another plan. 90 Minutes passed by, and we were under extra time. With just 5 minutes remaining, Tottenham players

tried everything they could to score. Even the goalkeeper came up during the corner kick to help out. With only 10 seconds remaining on the clock, they send the ball long towards Ajax's side. Striker wins the ball with his head, passes to the midfielder, back to Lucas, who is running into the box, and then... "Ohhhhh! LUCAS MOURA WITH THE LAST KICK OF THE GAME! SPURS ARE GOING TO THE CHAMPIONS LEAGUE FINAL!!!!!"

From the team that barely made it to the knockout stage to a Champions League finalist, Tottenham Hotspurs dramatic soccer was a memorable event for most football fans during that time. Even though they lost to Liverpool Football Club in the final, their passion and spirit are shown on the pitch. These beautiful miracles are things that people want to see. They are crazy about the real excitement of a sports game.

I believe that all teams aim for their success and work hard to achieve their goals. Of course, the strongest teams earn the most attention and fame from the fans. However, when the underdog players give their best efforts and positive attitude on the field, the fans are surprised and applaud them for their work. Like the phrase "ball is round," anything can happen in a game, making it unpredictable and sometimes surprising the fans.

There are a lot of unrecognized players who dream of becoming the protagonist in a dramatic story. As football fans, we should applaud all the players who are continuing to chase their dream. But, unfortunately, most of us are not always the winners; we are considered the underdogs in our life. Therefore, we should work to accomplish small steps at a time to achieve our final goals.