

PERFECT SAT

Old and new

Coaching was part of preparation for two Pa. teens.

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Max Young of Wynnewood and Christie Brandt of Malvern are members of an elite club.

Young, a junior at Episcopal Academy, and Brandt, a junior at Great Valley High School, are the only students in the state who scored a perfect 2,400 on the new SAT, the dreaded standardized college-entrance test.

They have more than their flawless scores in common. Their coach was **Matt Joseph**, who wrote his doctoral dissertation at Temple University on coaching for the SAT.

Joseph, 46, of Newtown Square has prepared high school students for the College Board test for 18 years.

He has also worked with student athletes trying to get NCAA college scholarships who fared poorly on the old test the first time around. On average, their scores went up 190 points, he said.

Joseph's secret for students such as Young and Brandt is culling the most difficult questions from old SAT tests and letting his students practice with them. As for the essay, he says the College Board is known to ask questions about human nature.

"So you might start out with, 'Throughout the course of history, man has always,' . . . write two clear paragraphs backing up your thesis, and then sum it up with something like, 'Hopefully in the future, man will be able to . . .'" Joseph advises.

Young and Brandt, both 17, also scored a perfect 1,600 on the old SAT. The revamped test added an 800-point essay section to the reading and math sections.

The College Board, which administers the test, would not confirm the identity of the students who scored 2,400, citing privacy reasons. However, officials at Episcopal Academy in Merion and Great Valley, both in Chester County, confirmed that their students had perfect scores.

Just 107 students nationwide got perfect scores among more than 300,000 high school students who took the test for the first time on March 12.

As for Young, the son of lawyers Annemiek and James A. Young, he is just glad he doesn't have to take the test again. In a recent interview, he discussed his life, both personal and academic.

What colleges are you interested in attending?

Harvard, Dartmouth and Stanford, to major in economics and prepare for a business career.

What are your hobbies?

My hobbies include reading (historical fiction, fantasy, mystery), playing the saxophone (I play in the jazz combo at school and in a jazz ensemble outside of school), and participating in varsity squash and varsity crew.

What is it like to know that you scored perfectly on both the old SAT and the new one?

I was hoping to do well on the old SAT the first time, and was very pleased when I found out that I had scored perfectly. On the new SAT, I felt some pressure to attempt to repeat my performance, but I tried to go in and do my best without focusing on my earlier score. I spent time preparing and am happy that my work paid off.

Do you remember the toughest question, and did you think you were going to blow it?

I remember worrying about the new reading sections, as I had not prepared as thoroughly for those, and if the sheer length of the new test would cause me to make mistakes.

What was the stupidest question?

I do not remember any question in particular, as I tried to keep moving the whole time and not dwell on any single question.

The new test has an essay. What was the question, and how did you go about answering it?

The question was "Is the opinion of the majority a good guide to follow?" I tried to answer the question in a four- or five-paragraph essay. I responded "No" and drew on the best examples I could find, eventually settling on the experiences of Galileo in the context of his position on heliocentrism [the concept that Earth revolves around the sun] and the resistance of the Catholic Church to his theory, and Martin Luther's comparable experience with the religious majority.

Do you think the SAT is given too much importance?

I think the SAT is just part of the college admission process, and they examine your whole record.

What were you thinking during the down time of the test?

Mostly, "I'm really tired." It's a really long test, and toward the end I kept reminding myself to stay focused.

What did your friends say when they heard you had scored perfectly, not just once, but twice?

The first time I found out, we were all looking at our scores in school. They were all just as surprised as I was. The second time, they just asked, 'Are you serious?' and said, 'I'm tired of talking to you.' "

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Illustration/Photo: HINDA SCHUMAN / Inquirer Suburban Staff

Max Young, a junior at Episcopal Academy, put in serious time for the new SAT - and scored a perfect 2,400. He and Christie Brandt, a junior at Great Valley High, were the only students in Pa. to ace it.