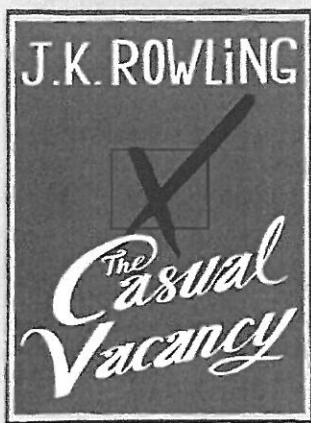


No magic

In September, JK Rowling, author of the bestselling Harry Potter series, released her adult-oriented novel. *The Casual Vacancy* transports us from the magical land of Harry Potter and into the Muggle World of his aunt and uncle. It is certainly an adult-oriented novel with recurring topics of sex and drugs. However, Rowling continues to teach us valuable life lessons with *The Casual Vacancy*, touching on motifs such as blame, selfishness and the uncertainties of having talent in both children and adult novels.

In *The Casual Vacancy*, the death of council member Barry Fairbrother sets the plot in motion. His passing causes a political struggle between the two-sided council to elect a favorable new member. Meanwhile, the interconnected lives of eight households change. Despite this large cast of characters, the novel is mainly focused on the trouble-making teenagers whose lives parallel those of their parents.

However, 512 pages are not enough to fully develop these eight households. *The Casual Vacancy* is dull, waiting until nearly the halfway point to gain any momentum. This tedium can be explained by the need for



character development of the many intertwined lives and the absence of a prequel to provide the back story. Ironically, most of the novel takes us through seemingly unimportant scenes.

Rowling's distinct use of metaphor, as seen in her previous works, is apparent in *The Casual Vacancy*. However, the plot is in no need of these stylistic features to explain procedures. Readers did not need "passage of a goat through the body of a boa constrictor" to describe a girl walking. Rowling does capture the accent of the rough neighborhood through her use of excessive cursing.

The author's first attempt at adult novels has been commercially successful, with opening week sales of 124,603, second to only Dan Brown's *The Lost Symbol*. This, of course, is credited to Rowling's legions of loyal, curious fans. Many, though, have been disappointed with *The Casual Vacancy*.

The Casual Vacancy will not permanently tarnish Rowling's reputation of a "storyteller like no other" (as asserted on its cover flap), but do not get your hopes too high. **FB**

R-R-Red

REVIEWS BY
MEGAN CHU

She's still singing about boys – just in different genres. The 22-year-old, six-time Grammy Award winner and American Music Awards 2012 favorite country female artist characterizes her fourth album as "all the different ways you can say goodbye."

If you are trying to guess the guys in her songs, you might find some truth in her statement. On *Red*, she's more accepting of the consequences of love.

iTunes's description of *Red* as "country" should be "country pop." Swift strays further from her country roots, her "comfort zone" as

she describes it in *The Wall Street Journal*, by choosing to collaborate with new people. Her interviews give us a clue as to why. In *The Wall Street Journal*, she calls it a way to "learn as much as you possibly can" and says that a genre should not "stifle you creatively." On MTV, she says that she does not want to "start to repeat myself" but "challenge myself and stretch further in different directions."

The tunes Swift writes tend to sound repetitive, so only her lyrics can distinguish them. It was her diary-esque lyrics full of relatable imagery of love that had captured her fans' hearts. However, she begins to lose it on *Red*. It can be a case of her outgrowing relatable high school situations or the direct opposite of her wish to "write with different people." Working with songwriters Max Martin and Shellback, famous for their work with pop artists, Swift co-wrote the poppest tracks on the album. "I Knew You Were Trouble" and "We Are Never Getting Back Together" are danceable and have topped Billboard charts, but they are also forgettable in being barely meaningful and full of repetition.

Her collaborations with Gary Lightbody (of Snow Patrol) and Ed Sheeran on "The Last Time" and "Everything Has Changed," respectively, proves that she only has to pick her co-writers wisely and be careful not to conform to what is popular. "Red," "The Last Time" and "I Almost Do" are among the best of the 16-track album. If you want to buy *Red*, go for the deluxe edition because it oddly features three bonus tracks that are the most soulful of them all. We bet it's a marketing strategy. **FB**

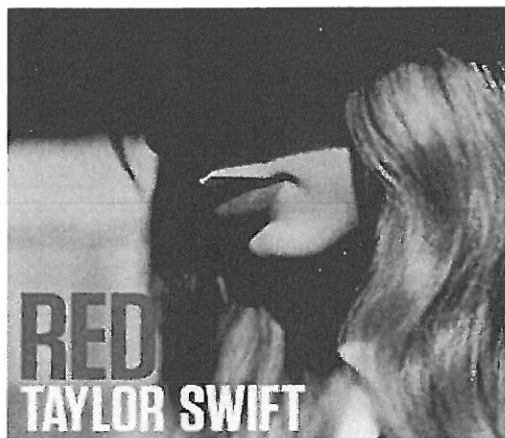
OTHER VIEWS

"We Are Never Getting Back Together," compared to her previous songs like "Teardrops On My Guitar," has no emotion. When you look at the lyrics, I prefer her old songs."

– Tiffany Lee, grade 9

"I like the new album because it's so different. I knew her old songs, but this album was unexpected, like good unexpected. Like "I Knew You Were Trouble," because it has dubstep.

– Julius Aaron Utama, grade 11



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Feedback = 3 ½ out of 5 stars
Country Weekly = 3 ½ out of 5 stars
Rolling Stone = 3 ½ out of 5 stars
Slant = 3 out of 5 stars
CNN = B+

Drive personified

This issue's honorees are powered by passion and long-standing commitment.

BY TAYLOR LARSEN

Jake Schiede, captain and three-year varsity basketball member, has developed a profound love for basketball.

His passion for the sport has pushed him to strive for the majority of his life. This season, he will work toward further developing his skills.

1. How long have you been playing basketball?

I've played basketball for as long as I can remember. My first organized team was an under-6 team, so probably around 5. I still have the very first pair of basketball shorts I ever played in.

2. Just how passionate are you about basketball?

All my relatives from my dad's side are massive basketball fans; my dad played for the Australian junior team and my grandpa still referees back home.

I'm careful to never make my sport a chore. It is the perfect mix of being able to rely on the team when you aren't at your best, yet also being able to individually shine. That's what I really love about it.

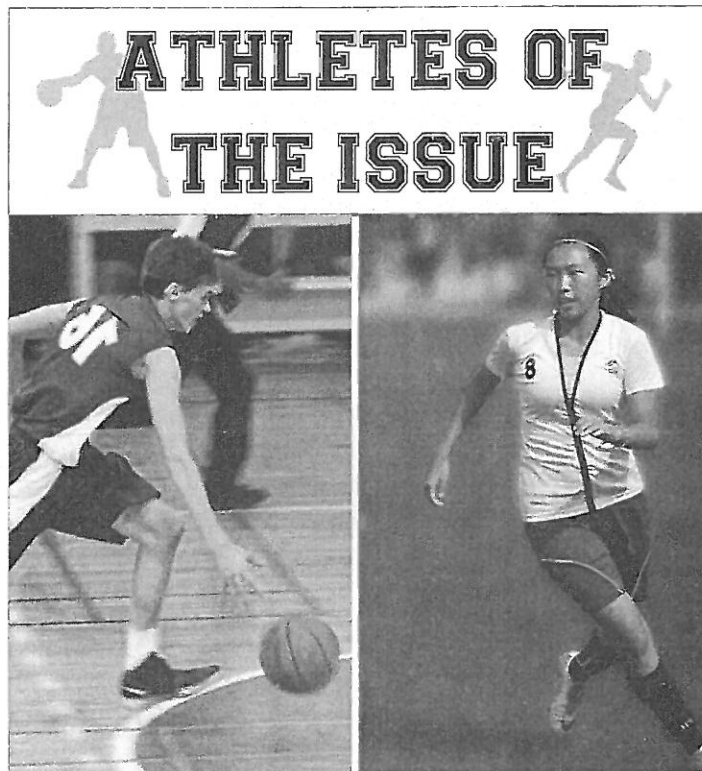
3. Do you feel that passion for a sport drives you to work harder? Why?

Yeah, absolutely. In sports, it's easy to see the benefits from your practice and hard work.

When a play runs perfectly, or you make a shot you've practiced hundreds of times, you immediately recall the time you spent perfecting that move.

4. What factors primarily drove you to play basketball?

Part of it was definitely my family; you always want to follow in their footsteps. I also feel like basketball is a truly unique sport.



Season 2 varsity athletes: Left, varsity basketball captain Jake Schiede. Right, varsity touch player Hannah Lim.

Public domain

Senior Hannah Lim is a skilled, well-rounded athlete who consistently strives to be the best that she can be. She has been a member of the varsity touch rugby team for three years now. Hannah characterizes the love she has for touch rugby and how it pushes her to the best of her abilities.

1. How long have you been playing touch rugby?

I started in middle school – sixth grade if I remember correctly – and am still playing today.

2. Just how passionate are you about touch?

I wake up at 5 a.m. for morning practices so I would say I am highly passionate!

Passion for the sport is

what keeps me happily playing. Moreover, I get to work with a great team and great coaches.

3. Do you feel that passion for a sport drives you to work harder? Why?

Yes, for sure! For both soccer and touch, passion motivates me to work harder. One of my favorite quotes from soccer season is, "Success is no accident. It's hard work, perseverance, learning, studying, sacrifice and, most of all, love of what you are doing or learning to do." Sometimes, the love of the sport is the only thing that will make me want to continue.

4. What factors primarily drove you to play touch rugby?

Although I am always exhausted during games, I really cherish the beautiful improvised plays my team creates. They're hard to forget.

Also, the medal. Despite my passion as a motivation to continue playing touch, I really want to medal in my last IASAS in high school.