

The time to prepare was short; I had not a second to waste. I had received an email inviting me to participate in a selection exam that offered a chance to go to the International Junior Science Olympiad, which would be held in Azerbaijan. I asked my mom whether she would allow me to go. She answered “sure”, but she didn't really believe I could pass the tests: I hadn't shown any special talent for science until then.

I now thank her for her skeptical attitude. It made me determined enough to dive into my books, and after three weeks of incessant studying, I went on to take the test in Sao Paulo, about six hours away from my home. There, I met Brazil's brightest students accompanied by their teachers and armed with intimidating expressions. I got excited to know I would be sitting amongst the best, but it also made me nervous. The exam was very difficult and I was exhausted. I almost gave up. However, I realized this would mean accepting failure before even trying. My desire to succeed gave me strength, and I managed to finish the test. I didn't think I stood a chance, but after two weeks, I found out I had been selected!

The following year, I went to the same competition, this time in Nigeria. There I met Sasha, an amazing girl from Russia. We talked a lot about our dreams and lives during the ten days we spent there, and became very good friends. We promised each other we would try to meet again in Estonia, at the 2012 International Physics Olympiad (IPhO). Nevertheless, it turned out keeping my word was harder than I had expected.

In 2011, I had a disagreement with the Brazilian Physics Olympiad leader. He is of the opinion that students should focus only in Physics, and I was also participating in the Brazilian Biology Olympiad. When he discovered that he said: “I'll allow you to compete in the IPhO under one condition: you'll have to place first in the Brazilian selection exams. If you don't get a gold medal, I'll never again allow students to participate in other competitions if they want to go to the IPhO.”

It took me some time to realize he was serious; in all ten years Brazil has participated in the competition, we have only received one gold medal. At first, knowing that other students' fate depended on me seemed too much pressure to handle, but promises are promises. I studied hard, and solved almost 1,000 Physics problems. My efforts were rewarded: I was first place in the selection, and got the second Brazilian gold medal in IPhO ever. Sasha also managed to keep her side of the bargain and we were able to see each other again. However, I had become more mature by this time. I guess she couldn't see me as her old playful friend anymore, and so we didn't talk nearly as much this time. Still, keeping my promise was worth it – studying allowed me to grow.

Taking part in science Olympiads required a lot of effort – but each time I felt more mature after the hard work and my motivations changed with me. In the beginning, I just wanted a challenge. Then, the friends I met and experiences I had became what drove me. Today, it is my passion for science that determines me the most. All the pressure I faced didn't stop me in the past, and I'm certain it won't stop me in the future.