

2/16/18

Robert Fulghum wrote a very popular book some years ago titled All I Really Need to Know I learned in Kindergarten. Based on this week, the book I would write would be All I Really Need to Know I Learned Watching Girls' Tiller Water Polo. Like the girls' wrestlers who competed last week in a second level CIF tournament, like the boys' wrestlers who will compete in a first level of the CIF tournament, and like the boys' and girls' basketball teams who both competed in CIF this week, the girls' water polo competed in a CIF first round game against Webb High School.

Because the girls won their first CIF game (16-9), they were afforded the opportunity to compete in the second round as a home team. We hosted the game at Foothill High School, since our water pump doesn't come in until this weekend. The game's relative proximity meant that not only I could attend, but other Tustin High School students, parents and friends could as well. As both teams warmed up in the pool, there was evidence of extra energy towards this formidable foe, Valley View High School. Valley View had a record of 20 to 10 coming into the game, and the OC Register picked them as the clear favorite. Our girls were playing at their highest level, but their 11 to 10 record suggested it would be a difficult opponent.

The game started quickly and Valley View scored on the first possession. The ease at which they scored looked ominous. Their record and ability to advance in CIF became obvious very quickly. Our girls showed that they were going to battle, but it didn't take long before the score was 1 – 4. Three goals down seemed like a huge lead- especially watching the flow of the game. Another key point was when the score was 2-6; it seemed like a turning point. Our girls could either start to figure out a way to get back into the game, or they could allow the game to get out of reach. Knowing the character of the Tillers in the pool, it wasn't a huge surprise to see them amp up their resolve and find a way to make it close. At halftime, they trailed 4 – 6.

As intense as the game was to that point, the drama was just getting started. We opened the second half with a goal and, suddenly, it was a one-point game. From there, a lot of back and forth occurred, and the momentum seemed to change on every other possession. We never led throughout the game, but all that mattered was the 9-9 score at the end of regulation. The outcome was truly in the balance, and even the most casual observer turned into a cheerleader for one team or the other. During that second half, each goal brought a loud eruption on the backs of nervous anticipation. The intensity escalated even more in overtime, but the first overtime ended the same as it started- tied. It looked like the second overtime was going to end in the same fashion until the outcome was determined with only 28 seconds left on the clock.

During the overtimes and during the time outs, I started to reflect on the game and what I was observing. The following thoughts flowed through my brain at one time or another and I thought I would record them in my reflection on the week:

- 1) Results are not predetermined. Our actions and mental approach determine outcomes – Our girls did not go by team records or the talent level of the opponent, they focused on their plan and gave their full effort. Pregame predictions did not determine flow of the game- the girls in the pool determined that.
- 2) Maximizing strengths is underrated – Our girls are a unique group of young ladies. They are all so different and bring such a wide range of skills to the team. To the coaches credit. Watching Kalypso block a shot, throw the ball the length of the pool into a small open piece of water so that Dana could scoop it up, and throw it into the net was a great example of strengths at play.

- 3) Much of the game was underwater – Girls were fighting for position, leverage and advantage throughout the game. I am sure that they were exhausted and felt like they could barely keep themselves above water. I am sure they were overwhelmed at times. It reminded me of this week because of several conversations I had in formal meetings with adults and informal conversations with students. We all feel overwhelmed from time to time and some of us more than others. Individually, these girls would have been overwhelmed, but they pulled each other along as a team. We had so many examples of team work behind the scenes this week to keep us afloat. One of our strengths is our counseling department. They work with so many students and serve such an important role for both mental wellness and life preparation. They are a treasured part of our school, and this week they intervened with some difficult issues. I am sure there were times when they could have felt overwhelmed, but they relied on their team. Ironically, I was talking about mental health with students when someone said a shooting just happened in Florida. That event weighs heavily on every educator, student, and parent whenever something like this happens. I am so grateful for our admin, counselors, teachers, staff, and even students who recognize potential red flags and proactively make sure that proper protocols are followed to ensure everyone is safe. This week reminded me that it is extremely important that we not only proactively teach social emotional skills, but that we also follow our safety protocols. To that end, we are planning an additional lock down drill this spring just to make sure we all know what to do. Academics and life planning are extremely important, but mental wellness and safety are our first priority.
- 4) Adversity is difficult, but can build perseverance – Our girls' water polo team has faced their fair share of adversity this year. Even in the game yesterday, there were some rough spots when they could have folded. Their determination was evident, and the tie score in double overtime was quite a show of resilience. It seemed that with each obstacle they faced and overcame, their confidence built.
- 5) Winning is a team thing – While everyone contributed differently, the commitment to working as a team shown bright in the pool and on the sidelines. There wasn't any regard for personal interests. The goal was to win as a team, and that is usually the recipe for good things; and it was yesterday. Because it was such a team effort, I am including the names of all the varsity team members: Briana Boatman, Sara Chan, Kalypso Fish, America Garcia, Alyssa Haas, Monica Hernandez, Chaise Howard, Emma Johnson, Rachel Miner, Julia Moffat, Hannah Muñoz, JulieneLouisa Ros, Melissa Segovia, Chloe Smit, Vanessa Tang and Dana Twisk.

So with under a minute to go in the game, our girls found themselves with the ball and on the opponent's end of the pool. Our main weapons had been fast breaks and penalty shots, but now they were in a half pool situation that had not proven successful most of the game. Suddenly, Dana rolled and shot out from her position in the middle of the pool with a few quick backstrokes. She created just enough space to receive a precision pass, and with 28 seconds left in the game, she threw the ball just passed the goalie in the corner of the net. A group of girls who had not been predicted to win, advanced to the third round of CIF. (That game will happen at Foothill High School at 11:00 am on Saturday.) It was a game that felt like a metaphor for the week, and WE WON! Tiller Students and adults alike erupted in excitement. I even saw some tears of joy among us. It was a great moment, and made me proud to be a Tiller, not because we won, but because we showed up with our best effort and learned so much!

Go Tillers!

Jon