

Live Like a Champion

Nine years ago, when I attended my first State Final Four, my dad and I were simply following a 15-year-old freshman phenom named LeBron James.

What began as a father/son outing has grown to include my brother Jake, family friends, my uncle Steve, and my little cousin Matt. We spend the last weekend in March each year watching the best teams in Ohio fight to earn the title of state champion.

After almost a decade, our traditions were set. We come down on Wednesday night to eat at our favorite restaurant. Each night we swim at the hotel, we eat breakfast at Bob Evans all three days, and we tailgate after each of the twelve games. But this year I got the opportunity to take in my favorite weekend of the year from a new perspective.

The OHSAA and the Columbus Sports Commission had invited me to be a part of the inaugural Be a Sports Journalist program. I was to come down to the state finals with four other students, sit in press row for the games, meet with professional reporters to learn about their job, and of course eat the free food in the hospitality room during intermissions. Two of those three ideas sounded good to me.

The four students I was with were really into journalism. The two seniors, Tyler and Nathan are both attending the University of Missouri next year, which is known for its journalism. Faiz, from Lakota East, really knew his sports and was the sports editor for his top notch paper. Michaela was really excited to be there and was asking questions to anyone who had answers. As for me, I was there to sit in the front row and eat beef sandwiches whenever I was hungry. I'm not sure if I want to write for a living, and I really didn't want to listen to the speakers while games were going on.

The first game of the day was interesting to me. The Orrville Red Riders were playing Lima Central Catholic. My team, Wadsworth, had played a very close game with Orrville earlier in the year. At halftime, the game was close. The five of us student journalists went in to listen to Columbus Dispatch reporter Steve Blackledge. What Steve had to say was interesting, during halftime. When the third quarter began though and my partners were still asking Steve questions, what he had to say was like background music to me as I was listening to the cheers of the crowd from out on the court. About a half an hour later, Steve wrapped it up, and we could return to our seats. It was the beginning of the fourth quarter; Orrville was now down ten. Orrville ended up losing the game by three. I was not happy. I had missed the turning point of the game in the third quarter.

The five of us were now instructed to go and listen to the post game press conferences. I enjoyed Orrville's because I was familiar with the players and coach. I had even guarded one player, All-Ohioan guard Jacob Bolyard. As the Red Riders filed out and Lima filed in, I could tell I was going to be bored. I was impatient as I was ready to go watch the next two teams warm up. The press conference went by slow, and finally the Associate Commissioner for Operations, Bob Goldring, began to wrap it up. Then, Coach Bob Seggeron from Lima, who had before this year been a five-time state semi-finalist but never a state champion, told Bob he had one more thing to say. I rolled my eyes, but this one final thing he had to say changed my viewpoint on the whole weekend. His voice cracked as a few tears watered his eyes. His words were short and sweet, but

for me, it was exactly what I needed to hear. He talked of his 32 years of coaching, of his great teams that never could quite finish it off, and then he said, "I get to walk out on top." Seggerson was retiring.

This man put his blood, sweat, and now tears into this program for over three decades, and he got to retire a champion. I truly learned a lesson during my experience in Columbus.

Whether I want to be a journalist, a coach, a teacher, or anything else, I need to work hard, have passion, and hopefully I can walk out like Bob Seggerson, a champion.