The Message of the NACA

The 2014 edition of the NACA Soccer/Volleyball Nationals was memorable in more than one way. This is our 35th year of hosting NACA events, so having the largest crowd ever with 1,138 participants was special. The 40 volleyball teams and 25 soccer teams made their way to Dayton Mountain from 15 states. According to many coaches and alumni present, what makes the NACA experience unique is the atmosphere. The competition is outstanding, but the moments spent worshipping together change lives and provide opportunities to disciple and mentor. During the evening rallies several athletes gave their lives to Christ. Many accepted the challenge to be all in for God. Others found encouragement knowing they can truly succeed spiritually. However, one amazing story happened away from the rally.

The Division 3 volleyball championship featured Victory Christian from IN and Forest Lake from FL. The match started at 5:00pm on Friday with Forest Lake emerging from the loser’s bracket needing to defeat Victory twice to earn their second consecutive championship. Before the match began the AD from Forest Lake told me that many of their families were Adventist and they would not be able to continue competing after sun down. If they were fortunate enough to defeat Victory in the first match before 5:45pm they could finish, because sun down was not until 6:45pm. The match was very competitive with Forest Lake winning, but it was just after 6:00pm. As he walked over to his team and shared that they had to forfeit the “if” match, their eyes were filled with tears. I walked over to communicate to Victory that they were winners by forfeit, and I could tell that their competitive nature had a difficult time accepting the news. After I passed out all the trophies both teams and all the fans just stood there trying to absorb the moment. **It was then that we witnessed the remarkable**. In a scene I wish that all of America could have taken in, the Victory girls in unity said, “Let’s give them our first place trophy!” Across the court they went to deliver the trophy as the rest of us stood back and enjoyed watching two teams hug, laugh and cry all at the same time. What a moment of sportsmanship at its finest. Victory returned to their bench about the same time that we heard the Forest Lake girls say, “Let’s give them our sportsmanship trophy!” Across the net they went as many of us adults, including myself, tried to keep composure.

Later when the Division 2 championship teams began to warm up I spoke with Megan Huber, Victory’s coach, and asked her how such a moment was possible. She replied, “**It’s the message of the NACA**. From the Wednesday morning devotional to Roger Wood’s message to John Zeller’s challenge and everything in between.” Coach Zeller reminded all of us that it’s not about our stats. It’s about bringing glory to God in how we play and how we live that matters. Two teams lived out that message giving us a God-moment that will never be forgotten.

The NACA has named them Co-Champions. Every time someone picks up an NACA media guide or visits our website looking for past champions they will see two teams listed together as 2014 NACA champs. This will forever serve as a reminder that two volleyball teams playing at a high level made heaven notice when the competition became not about taking home a championship banner, but about putting others first and pleasing God. I, for one, was impacted greatly and will never forget the last Friday of October 2014.

“And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” Colossians 3:17