



Musings from the Chief Cook and Bottle Washer  
June 14, 2010

## End of the Beginning

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I attended the Lancaster High School's sports banquet last week on the invitation of Coach Kevin Carrierro who basically said, and to paraphrase a famous line from "Die Hard", "come out to the high school, we'll have a few laughs". Needless to say, I did have a few laughs but it was interspersed with tears and thoughts to ponder as each student-athlete received recognition for their past season's accomplishments by the coaches and their peers. This evening is most likely representative of all the Section 6 sports banquets this time of year and the emotions that are an integral part of these events.

The way Lancaster holds their sports banquet is to have all the teams congregate in the school cafeteria for general awards and then split up into the individual sports for team specific awards. Athletic Director Len Jankiewicz emceed the night's festivities and handed out the senior awards to all seniors in all the spring sports and to the MVPs (Melissa Kurzdorfer and Corey Davis, a lacrosse player). It was a great way to begin the evening or should I say, the evening's marathon. I've been to many sports banquets and they all seemed to take forever to acknowledge the student-athletes and to present the awards but little did I know, this would rival many of the outdoor invitationals in duration. Once the general awards were doled out, the teams split up and headed off to the rooms reserved for their presentations.

The theme of the "End of the Beginning" was chosen by the three Lancaster coaches, Coach "C", Chuck Friedmann and George Rak as part of commencement of sort for many of the seniors who have run, jumped or threw their last event in their high school athletic career. Some will continue to compete at the collegiate level, others will call it a career but either way, "End of the Beginning" is so appropriate in so many ways. Some observations as I wipe away a few tears:

- George Rak stated "he has been dreading this evening for the last six years." Obviously he carries a special place in his heart for many of his student-athletes but obviously a special relationship developed with Melissa. This was evidenced during his speech but no more obvious than at States once Melissa threw her last discus and won the Federation Championships. Tears were flowing like champagne at New Years. What was neat was it was a graduation of sorts with all the competitors hugging one another and congratulating themselves for four solid years of friendly competition. Cleveland Hill coach Glen Graham and his protégé, Taylor Eldridge, have quite the bond as George and Melissa, and it too was evidenced at States. One thing that George did mention at the banquet, it was time to celebrate but "there is still much work to be done."
- I've noticed that coaches have as much love for their athletes as some parents do with their own children. They both watch the kids grow, improve and become young adults but from different perspectives. You can see it in their eyes as they well up with tears and hear the cracks in their voices as they speak about them

- Funny how the coaches all seem to have the one or two student-athletes who when introduced, there's a big collective sigh, a smile and some statement about how this particular kid is a goof, makes the coaches laugh or in some cases "is a thorn in their side". However, this individual somehow turned things around in the sport or is one of the hardest working members of the team! Who says sports does not build character?
- One female student-athlete in particular was singled out at the track awards as being a very shy person who did not believe in herself when she joined the team. She felt she was an outsider but slowly put her focus to the sport and eventually earned the admiration of her teammates for her hard work. She steadily improved her performances and the coaches are excited to see what she can do next year. I love these types for stories because it just shows how school sports help to improve the social skills, self esteem, concentration and the sense of belonging to a special group of people. These sports are where leadership, accountability and responsibility are developed. Unfortunately, this is something many people in charge of budgets do not see nor understand. This is one reason why sites such as Section6Runs exists, to promote the sports of XC and Track & field to show others how school sports have a positive impact in the development of these student-athletes.
- As Len Jankiewicz so appropriately put it, many of these student-athletes move on to greater and better things. He cited many examples of Lancaster alumni who have not only excelled in collegiate sports but also in business and government. These student-athletes are our future leaders who will hopefully turn around the things that our generation failed to do.

The "End of the Beginning" is such an appropriate theme in we've watched this development of these student-athletes over the course of 4-6 years as coaches helped to build the foundations to become successful at the next level, whether it be in collegiate sports or just being able to handle academic course loads. It's not that we are losing these individuals as they graduate and move on in life, it's just passing them along to their next set of challenges and experiences. Think of it as passing on an heirloom.

All good things must come to an end in life and when that time comes, we pass along things that are most treasured to us. In the case of high school athletics, the student-athletes are moving on to another "family member" in another town...different coaches, surroundings, and training techniques but the same sport. We get to sit back now and enjoy seeing how that foundation you coaches and parents built blossom into new directions that we may not have even considered. Their eyes are opened to not only what is available to them outside high school but also the realization of the potential they have to do bigger and better things.

Yes, coaches and parents, you "done good."