



RIVALRY GAME

Normally practice the day before a game was more laid back and consisted of a lot of fine-tuning. This was not a normal practice the day before a game.

The players were more vocal than usual. Every loose ball was a battle. The energy was high.

Jaylen, who had in fact torn his ACL, gave his Coach a summary of yesterday's meeting. Coach Dunn believed what was discussed was genuine he hadn't expected the principles to take hold this quickly.

"Great practice, today! That's the way to bounce back from your last game."

Even though all the players were thinking it, Learie was the one that spoke first.

"We've dug ourselves quite a hole, but we're determined to finish the season strong. We know how we need to go about our business, Coach. We're sorry for how we've been handling ourselves this year and that changes now."

"I appreciate that. I believe you guys."

In all his years of coaching, Denny Dunn had thought he'd seen it all. But the way this team approached today's practice. The way all 12 guys seemed to bring a different mentality was something unique. There just might be something special to it.

“Make sure you guys get into the training room and get the treatment you need but don’t be late for dinner. Remember to study your scouting reports and get some rest tonight. We have a big game tomorrow.”

“Yes, sir!” the 12 players seemed to say in unison.

A little more than 24 hours later as the Eagles sat down next to their lockers after finishing up with their rivals, they weren’t quite sure what Coach was going to say.

“Last time we met after a game, I was frustrated and didn’t know if there was any hope to the season. Tonight, I’m frustrated but I’m extremely hopeful.”

Coach Dunn took a sip of water and continued.

“I’m frustrated because you guys fought your tails off tonight. I wanted to see you get the ‘W’. That probably would have been too much like a movie. But make no mistake. All those things you guys talked about were real. You might not have gotten rewarded on the scoreboard for the new attitude, but it was obvious to anyone watching that there was something different about you.”

Coach Dunn could tell that they were glad he was recognizing them but still disappointed that they lost.

“You didn’t win tonight on the scoreboard, but you won in my book. I know that might sound cheesy, but the truth is that you nearly beat an extremely good Tiger team tonight. You nearly pulled off the upset even though you hadn’t built up habits throughout the course of the season. Imagine what can be done if we continue what we started the last couple of days. The good news is we have enough time left in the season to develop the kind of habits on the court that will match your attitudes.”

Coach Dunn picked up a dry erase marker and approached the white board, writing the word LEADERSHIP.

“This is what I saw tonight. I saw leadership. I saw teammates helping each other. I saw unselfish play. And near the end when it was

apparent that we weren't going to win, I didn't detect any finger-pointing or blame being thrown around. I saw leadership from 12 guys, not just a senior or a starter or from a coach. As I said I'm hopeful because I'm seeing genuine leadership from you guys."

Coach Dunn paused and looked at the white board. He pointed at the word LEADERSHIP and then pointed at each one of his players saying their name out loud.

"Each of you can be a positive leader for us moving forward. This can still be a special season because, as you've already discovered, you are interconnected and responsible to one another on this journey. And make no mistake, it is a journey, not just a destination. You didn't win tonight but you took a giant step forward on this journey together. Now, bring it in."

The players got up from their seats quickly and met in the center of the locker room.

With an enthusiasm unmatched at any point in the season, the team said together "1, 2, 3, TEAM."