

SPORTS MEMORIES

High School Wrestling: The Secret Signal and the Upset Victory

By Christian Heisey
Decree Staff Writer

Before the match, the Dixon High fans were getting restless, waiting for the ref to call us to the center of the mat. I stood there in amazement at the behemoth who stood across from me. He towered over me at 6' 1", with broad, muscular shoulders;

LONGEST

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The first mile was unremarkable. I kept putting one foot in front of the other. "If I can get through the first mile, I can finish the race," I told myself. The trail brought us out of the woods, and I felt the sun on my back. The warmth surged through me, fueling my every step. I burst from the last of the trees and I saw it—a Little League softball field. It took me back to my early days of softball,



Hannah Ivester

and I heard the chirping voices repeat cheers that I hadn't heard in a decade. I imagined the small voices cheering for me, rooting me on.

As I continued to run, I heard another college's coach call out the time "9:43." I was taken aback. I had finished the first mile in less than 10 minutes? I felt a surge of pride. I could do this. My ankle could do this. I picked up the pace a little, ignoring the pain that shot through my foot. I was going to finish the race, and I was going to do it in less than 30 minutes. The next mile was a breeze. I don't know if it was pride, adrenaline, or stubbornness, but it was one of the least memorable miles of my career. I didn't pass anyone because I was pretty far back from the pack at that point, but I saw my parents and they told me after the race that they hadn't seen traces of pain in my face, only determination. The last mile, though, was pretty rough.

The course went back in to the woods, twisting and weaving through rolling hills, and I had to be careful of the treacherous roots that seemed to reach up and grab at my feet. I came upon another runner—a woman from William Peace. She would meander along the trail until she heard my laboring breath, and then she'd dart about 100 yards ahead. Irritating as it was, I let it slide and maintained my pace, still just willing my body to let me finish the race. As the third mile came to an end, the final 150 meters was coming up. Usually, I tend to pick up the pace and try to pass runners at this final straightaway. This was not a usual race.

I emerged from the woods, cresting the final hill, and I could see the finish line. The white flags fluttered in the wind as runners pushed to complete the race. I centered my vision on the massive red numbers—the race clock. They flashed at me "29:39." 20 seconds. Could I run 150 meters in 20 seconds? I was going to try. I hadn't pointed my toes since I fell before the race, but with every bit of grit I could muster, I changed my stride. I drove with my knees, imagining that with every jut forward I was breaking through the walls of pain in my ankle. I entered the flag-lined straightaway. "29:51." I passed the annoying sprint-walker from Peace. "29:54." My ankle popped and I faltered just a little, about 30 yards from the finish. "29:58." I pushed with everything I had left and flew through the finish. "30:06."

It wasn't pretty, and I didn't beat 30 minutes, but I had finished the race and I even scored for my team (there were 3 runners from our team behind me). As soon as I passed my bib to the workers at the finish line, I felt the wet tears, built up from the last 3 miles, begin to fall down my cheeks. I limped to the training tent and collapsed on the table. It was done. The race was over. I had done it. I got ice, looked to my coach, and asked, "Can we get Chick-Fil-A for lunch?"

legs that could rival a tree trunk; and a face that only a mother could love.

As I paced back and forth across the rubber nitrile mat, I looked at my coach in despair and said, "There's no chance I'm getting out of this with a win."

After watching my opponent for a few moments, my coach grabbed me by the shoulder and whispered, "Believe in yourself, you got this."

The announcer called us. The coaches took their seats as we checked with the score-table. The ref explained the rules, told us to shake hands, and blew the whistle. The match had begun.....

It was a Sunday evening in January 2011. Jacksonville High School was in the Onslow County Cup Wrestling Tournament. Each year, the location rotates among county schools. This year it was held at Dixon High School, a small 1A school with an enrollment of about 700 students. The tiny gymnasium was at full capacity. The smell of nachos and popcorn lingered in the air from the concessions. There were the screams of eccentric parents and frustrated coaches ringing off the walls.

My team was having an average year at best, coming into the tournament with an 8-9 team record. We had no reason to be the favorites to win. That honor belonged to Dixon. Through sheer coincidence, I found myself in the 145-pound division final. There had been a forfeit and an injury by my previous opponents en route to the championship, and I became the only freshman to reach the finals. My opponent was on a strong Dixon team that was predicted during the pre-season to win a state championship. He was a senior who had won an individual state title the previous year by a landslide. He was stronger, faster, and pos-

High School Basketball: The Dramatic Game-Winning Shot

By Jared Joyner
Decree Staff Writer

Waking up that morning in Wake Forest, I felt different, in a good way. I woke up to the song "Just Fine" by my mom's favorite artist, Mary J. Blige. It was a Friday and that meant game day.

As I got myself ready, I realized there was time to pick up breakfast before school. So, I decided to stop at Bojangles and get the usual, a sausage biscuit, fries, and a pink lemonade. I pulled up to the window and when I went to hand the lady my money, she said, "No need to pay. This one's on the house." I just knew this day was going to be a good one.

After eating my free Bojangles, I walked into my first-period class, math, which was not my favorite subject. For some reason I was happy to be there today. Before taking my seat, I kept thinking "Why do I feel so good today? What's happening?" Then I thought my day was going to turn upside down as my teacher said she was returning the test that we'd taken the previous week. I was a 100 percent sure I had failed it. When my teacher came and slapped the test sheet on my desk, I took a big gulp. Then I grabbed my paper and looked at the grade—"91." I took a second look to make sure it didn't say 19, but it didn't. It was, in fact, a 91. I was so happy, I had the biggest smile on my face. This day couldn't get any better.

After a great day at school, it was time to prepare for my game that night. It was a big conference matchup and we needed a win. Before every high school game, I would go home and take a one-hour nap. As I was sleeping that day, I dreamt about the game; it was a back-and-forth contest all night. I was tied in the fourth quarter with four seconds left and my team passed the ball to me and I took the last shot.... Then, as you might expect, the alarm sounded to end my nap. I was mad I didn't get to finish my dream. Did we win or lose? That made me anxious about the game.

As I got ready to head to the gym, the positive vibe came back. While driving, I thought about all the good things that had happened that day—from the free Bojangles to the 91 on the math test that I was sure I had failed. Then, just as quickly, the good feeling vanished. I was filled with the sense that something was going to go wrong, and I didn't want our game to be the thing that would be the downfall to a great day. Before I got out of the car, a J. Cole song came on the radio and I began to feel good again.

This was a critical game for us; we were playing East Wake. It was our third game of the season and we had lost our first two. We couldn't afford to start the season 0-3. All summer I had been working hard to improve my game. Now a sophomore, I wanted to show that I had become a better player, a better point guard and leader, than I had been last season. The team we were playing had a 6-foot, 2-inch point guard named Tyrone Jackson. He had led our conference in scoring

for the last two years. He was very skinny and tall, lightning fast with the ball in his hands. If we wanted to win, we had to stop him. I knew it would be a tough task, but all summer I had been working for moments like this.

When I walked into our blue-and-white locker room, there was the new leather smell of our basketballs and the fresh detergent scent of our white-and-grey jerseys. I went to my locker and saw the word "Huskies" across my jersey. I felt so much pride looking at the jersey and, from that moment, I was in a zone and ready to play tonight. My teammate Sam walked over to me and said, "Let's get this win tonight." I put on my silky Nike jersey and laced my fresh blue-and-white Nike Kobe Bryant's sneakers. I was ready. Our coach came into the locker room and said, "Let's have a good warm-up, fellas. Tonight is a big game, let's go win it." During warm-ups, every time I shot the ball it would swish through the white, nylon nets. Then it was time to announce the starting lineups. As I stood at the bench to get called, I looked around our home gym, a gym that I loved. The lights were bright, and there was a nice shine on the floor and the big blue-and-grey H for my school name, Heritage. Then I glanced into the navy-blue bleachers filled with all our fans, chanting and hollering for us to win. The PA announcer called my name and I ran onto the court, ready for the game to start.

We all shook hands with the other team. Then the referee tossed the ball in the air and it was tipped back to me. As the team's starting point guard, I took a deep breath and began to advance the ball into the front court. I had been feeling good, so I called the first play for myself. I came off a screen, planted my feet, bent my knees, and launched a long three-point shot. As I released the ball, I saw it spinning in the air and then dropping right through the net, a swish. The crowd screamed and the announcer screamed over the speaker system, "Jared Joyner from deep for threeeeeeeeeeee."

During the first half, the game was back and forth, as Tyrone Jackson led the way for East Wake. My team struggled to guard Jackson and he really took charge as his team

round was about to begin, I looked into the crowd and saw my parents smiling at me. Joy ran across my face for I realized that no matter what, they were behind me.

The second round began as the first one ended: Christian smacking the ground like a slice of cheese when it hits the floor. It was all too familiar. The pattern went on this way for most of the round. But something was different now. After the first round I realized I could help my team win while losing. My opponent was on pace to win the match by technical fall, which occurs when one wrestler reaches a 15-point lead over his opponent, at which point the match is stopped. But this type of victory gamers only five team points, one short of the six that Dixon needed. At around the 40-second mark, my opponent took me down for another two points. The score was 26-12. Instead of standing me back up to take me down again, he held me down and tried and pin me for the six points. With my head and arm engulfed in his grip, my opponent rolled my body over until my back was just above the mat. The referee crawled over to us for a closer look.

"This is surely the end," I thought. Back at the beginning of the season, there were two rules established during our first practice. One: Always keep your ears open. Two: If the coach yells "IGD," do it. "IGD" was a foreign concept to me and a few of my teammates. Our coach explained it like this, "If you're about to get pinned, and you happen to have your arm under his body, listen for 'IGD.' That means you buckle down, man up, and squeeze his junk like your life depends on it. Just make sure the ref isn't looking."

Most observers would consider this

rude, cheating, and quite disturbing. But as a freshman, I viewed it as a means to a win. And I would do anything to impress the coach.

At the moment I was desperate for a means of escape. With sweat pouring off me, and my back close to touching the cold mat, I heard the familiar words from my corner.

"IGD!!!" Without hesitation, I enclosed my hand around his manhood and squeezed. My opponent stood with lightning speed, furious, and threw a haymaker that struck my cheek with the force of a car. I could feel my teeth crack against each other, and I was sure that my jaw had just been separated. He went to swing again, but the referee stopped him cold.

My coaches came to help me, as blood oozed from my mouth onto the mat. As they checked my mouth, I heard my opponent screaming at the referee, pleading his case that I was at fault for the punch he had just thrown at me.

But since the ref had not seen my provocative move, he awarded me the match by disqualification.

The gymnasium erupted into joy on one side and disbelief on the other. Jacksonville fans were ecstatic, as we had won the team County Cup, while Dixon fans were screaming for an appeal, calling the match "rigged."

As I stood there at the end, sweating, exhausted, still reeling from the trick I had just pulled, the referee raised my hand in victory. I walked off with my head held high as if I had won through sheer talent.

I put on my clothes and walked to the bathroom. Before I reached the door, my coach pulled me aside, wrapped his arm around my shoulder, and said, "I told you 'You got this.'"

went on a 13-2 run late in the first half. With three minutes left, Jackson silenced the home crowd with a lightning-quick drive down the lane. He made the layup and a foul shot.

With 10 seconds left, my team trailed by seven, I took a shot from the right side, but it hit the rim and bounced away. East Wake collected the rebound, hurried down court and made a three-pointer to open a 10-point lead at intermission.

It turned out that my three-pointer on our first possession was the only shot I had made in the half.

I walked into the locker room, grabbed a towel to wipe the dripping sweat off my face, and said to myself, "This is where my good day ends, I guess."

During half-time, we talked about how we were going to come back and win the game. Our coach said, "We have to stop turning the ball over and rebound." As he said "rebound," he slammed his white board against the ground, and all you heard was a loud crack as the board broke into two pieces. Right before we headed out the locker room, I brought my team together and in a very assertive tone I said, "Let's play this half with some passion and give it all we got." All the players were then locked-in and ready to turn the game around and get a win.

After my poor first-half shooting, I decided to start taking the ball to the basket to get myself going. The first play I drove into the lane against two tall players and scored a layup. I took a deep breath and said to myself, "Finally." Then on defense I stole the ball and passed ahead to one of my teammates for a slam dunk. The crowd went crazy; I could not hear my own thoughts. The team and I were playing well. At the end of the quarter, we were up by 2 points.

By the start of the fourth, it was clear that we needed stop Tyrone Jackson, who had continued to play a strong game. If we wanted to win, we needed to figure out a way to stop him. I decided to take on the challenge. He was now my man to guard.

The fourth quarter, the lead went back and forth. It was a dog fight. Then, with 30

seconds left, our coach called a much-needed timeout. The score was tied at 85. I walked to the bench and grabbed the green Gatorade bottle and squirted water into my mouth. I wiped sweat from my face with a towel. The coach looked at me and said, "Keep playing solid defense on Jackson. He only has two points this quarter." Determined to stop Jackson, I had been doing a good job all quarter, moving my feet and staying in front of him. One more stop and a basket would be a great end to a great day.

It was East Wake's ball and, even though I'd been playing tough defense, I knew they'd be giving the ball to their best player with the game on the line. I was ready. After the ref blew the whistle and handed the ball to East Wake, Jackson took a pass from a teammate. The clock wound down as he dribbled up the court. I could hear the crowd chanting DEFENSE with two loud stomps coming after it. Players had cleared one side of the floor and it was just me and him. I sat down low in a defensive position to get a stop. With 10 seconds left, he executed a behind-the-back move and then drove hard to the basket. At 6', 2", he made it hard for me to contest the shot. The ball floated through the hoop. East Wake was leading, 87-85, with four seconds left.

I couldn't believe it. My perfect day was going to end with me allowing the game-winning basket. During the timeout, our coach said, "Jared, I want you to go get the ball, rush down the court and take a shot."

The ref blew the whistle to end the timeout. As we walked on to floor, the whole gym was quiet, as if we had already lost. The ball was inbounded to me and I rushed up the right side of the court, taking three hard dribbles. Then I launched a shot from mid-court. My heart was beating out of my chest. Then, swish, the ball went through the net and I leapt high with indescribable joy. The crowd and my teammates all stormed onto the court and jumped all over me.

I ended that game with 23 points and made the game-winning shot. That was one of the best sports moments of my life.

MLK

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the least I could do to help out in a small way."

Like Anderson, Danny Henderson volunteered at the Habitat store, chipping up ceramic tiling with shovels. As a first-time participant, he said he was impressed by the number of students who took part in the day. An assistant professor of exercise science, Henderson teamed with members of the Exercise Science Club.

"It was difficult and non-glamorous work, but I finished the day feeling we had done something worthwhile, and I was glad we'd participated," Dr. Henderson said. "It was great to take part along with so many others."



Members of the college's Exercise Science Club volunteered for the MLK day of service. Photo Courtesy of D. Henderson