

Alaina Murphy

## A Game

If you've ever seen the movie *Remember the Titans*, you'll remember the blonde, curly haired character, the young girl who knew everything about football, about the team's players, and all the plays. She was at every game and followed her father around like a shadow. That little girl, was me....not the actress...the coach's daughter.

My father is a basketball coach at the high school I attended in our Wisconsin farming town of about 3,000 people. My childhood memories are a montage of squeaky gyms, and sweaty players; basketball games, and newspaper articles; jerseys, trophies, and trips to Madison to watch the state tournament. I see my entire town lined up outside the high school, sitting on lawn chairs in negative degree weather, waiting to buy tickets for the state tournament. I see my father standing on the hardwood Kohl Center floor, looking up at this same dedicated community, a triple-decked sea of red T-shirts.

In 2004, my dad's team became the first team in Wisconsin Boys Basketball History to appear in five consecutive state championship games, and in 2006 they became the first team, by far, to appear in seven straight state title game. In 2012, my father became the youngest coach to reach 500 wins.

But, this speech isn't *only* an outlet for me to brag about my father's basketball accomplishments. This winter, I found myself revisiting old Seymour Thunder basketball articles, buried in unmarked cardboard boxes in my basement...the same articles the younger version of myself would spring out of bed on Saturday mornings to read. And this time, in my father's words, I heard important lessons that the younger Alaina missed.

A 2004 article asked my father why he never accepted offers to coach at the college level. My dad responded:

"I think you have to be really careful when you make moves like that and you have to see what you want in life. My wife and I are both in education, we have four great kids and we like to spend a lot of time with them, I don't know too many college coaches who can also coach their third grade daughter's team and their sixth grade daughter's team."

As I rapidly approach my Harvard graduation I find myself swept up in uncertainty about the next steps—the path to and definition of success. But I can't deny that growing up, spending time with my dad was my favorite thing in the world. Better jobs and promotions are not always equivalent to *more*.

I can understand this, I can envision the kind of happy, loving life I want, but sometimes I'm still afraid... I have no idea how to get there. Sometimes Harvard feels like a pressure cooker of expectations and assumptions that everyone has everything all figured out.

When my dad was asked about the pressure of his team's incredible winning streak, he responded: "If it works out, great. If it doesn't, that's OK, too. I know this streak is improbable and it will end one day. And the world will be fine."

Reading this quote, I remember that I don't have to know how to get anywhere. I don't have to have it "all figured out." And, there are times when I will lose. We all will. But that's what makes this thing exciting.

When the Seymour basketball team finally *did* lose, my dad said this:

"It hurts like hell. Sometimes you taste that other side, and that's what keeps you going. But, I won't dwell on this a long time. On my way home from Madison tomorrow, I'll start to think about what we have to do to be competitive next year."

So, when we lose, when it hurts like hell, we must remember that we cannot dwell on loss forever. We must always look forward.

And in the quote I probably turn to most often, one sports writer recapped what he called his "favorite, more memorable, and most moving moment of the winter sports season." It was, he said:

"Watching Seymour basketball coach Jon Murphy console his two young daughters, Alaina, 11, and Bridget, 8, both wearing oversized Thunder jerseys and weeping after Seymour's early-season loss to Bay Port. "They live and die with every game," Murphy explained. "We win, and they're happy. We lose, and they're crying. I try and tell them that it's only a game, but..."

When I begin to worry about it all, I just need to remember, it's *only a game*.