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The Grand Tournament

Written By: Harry Gribnitz

The first day of March brought "March Madness" into downtown Grand Rapids. The Women's Big Ten Grand Tournament was held in Grand Rapids for the first time. I was fortunate to be able to attend most of the games. Van Andel Arena was filled with a level of excitement that only college sports can bring to the building. Each school brought its cheerleaders, band and core of loyal fans. Different sections of the venue were transformed by the distinctive school colors worn by the faithful followers.

For me, it was much more than just the excitement of the competition. The atmosphere created by the players and fans created a huge adrenaline rush. These athletes play for the love of the game and their loyalty to their teammates. I am not planning to report the details of the games, but I would like to share an observation.

The Big Ten has made major effort to encourage women to participate in sports through its DREAM BIG program. The DREAM BIG program helps to shape a young girl's future through her active involvement in sports to help achieve an overall healthy well being – physically, socially and mentally. The program covers everything from Public Service Announcements, to speaking engagements and to encouraging parental involvement. Did you know that women comprise 37% of high school athletes, 33% of college athletes and 39% of US Olympians? Research suggest that girls who participate in sports are less likely to get involved with drugs, less likely to get pregnant in high school and more likely to graduate from high school than non-participants?

However, organized programs and statistics don't contribute the same impact as the one-on-one approach. During the first day of the Grand Tournament, I observed a wonderful example. Before Northwestern's game one of the players came into the stands to greet her parents. While they talked, a young girl about 7 or 8 years old approached to ask for an autograph. The Lady Wildcat not only signed the autograph book, but also spent several minutes talking to her "fan". Quickly, a small cluster of young fans gathered around the pair. She patiently signed each book and spoke briefly to each of the youngsters. I am not sure who enjoyed the exchange more, the girls, the player or the player's beaming parents. You could see the encouragement that had been passed from parents to daughter was being passed to the next generation. Each of those girls now had a Big Dream of their own.

Thank You,

Harry Gribnitz
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PS: Please continue to refer friends, relatives or co-workers that might need my help to refinance or purchase their home.

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