Fall 10-2017

Utah State University Women’s Soccer Pre-Game Prayer Ritual

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Recommended Citation
Enos, Mealii, "Utah State University Women's Soccer Pre-Game Prayer Ritual" (2017). USU Student Folklore Fieldwork. Paper 188. https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/student_folklore_all/188
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Ritual

Informant

Wesley Hamblin has been a member of the Utah State University Women’s Soccer team for the past four years. She just completed her senior season as an Aggie, and has been playing soccer since she was four-years-old. Starting and playing all four years of her college career, she is well-known as a leader on the team and is a vocal and energetic player. I have played with her for the past two years. Wesley is from Alpine, Utah and has been a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints her entire life. She is studying Communications and Marketing and will graduate in the Spring of 2018.

Context

The Utah State Women’s Soccer team competes as a D1 team in the Mountain West league. This means that they compete at the highest division of college athletics and play other universities in the mountain west area. The time I collected this folklore was during a home game at Chuck and Gloria Bell Field. The field was prepared for a game day; the grass was newly mowed, the bleachers were clean, the lines and Utah State symbols on the field were freshly painted, and banners and flags lined the field. This folklore was collected on the last home game of the team’s Fall 2017 season. This game was very important to the team because they needed to win the game to move on to the conference tournament. It was also the Senior Game, a day and game to honor the graduating senior players. The day of this game had mild weather, was bright and sunny, and had lots of fans in the bleachers. The ritual involves every single player on the team, including injured and red shirt players (players who will not participate in competition that year but are still on the team). This ritual is the last part of the warm up and happens before every game, right before the announcers call out the starting line-up. It is never skipped. Wesley mentioned that “Part of it is just tradition, like there’s no way we’re not doing that even if we don’t have time.” The team gathers around the closest corner flag in a circle before praying. Anyone can offer to say the prayer. Kaitlyn Stratton (often called Stratt) who is an older girl on the team and a vocal leader will bring everyone in immediately after the prayer for a cheer. Wesley then leads the rest of the cheer as the team jogs back towards the bench. It is done at both home and away games.

I conducted the interview about this ritual several weeks after this game when the season had finished. Wesley is my roommate, so the interview was in my room at our off-campus home in Logan. She sat on my couch while I sat at my desk. My room was messy, and Wesley had to move things out of the way to sit down. Because we have known each other for a while, the mood was comfortable.
Meali: Ok so can you just, like, explain to me what happens when we do the pregame prayer thing?

Wesley: Ok, so, we warm up then once the warm ups over we go and change our jerseys and everyone jogs over to the corner flag and we all kneel on one knee, and take each other—cross our arms and take each person on our sides hands. Some people have like specific people they go next to each time and it changes each year. Some people just go in random spots, like this year, like I used to stand by specific people but I just this year was… anywhere on the outside of, like, I had a spot but not like, people, so I don’t know some people are superstitious about it. Umm. Then we just choose someone. We say, ask if someone wants to say it and then usually someone says it… I don’t know it just makes me refocus and like, take a deep breath and like get my priorities straight on it, and focus for the game better? And, uh, connect with the team cause whenever I’m holding people’s hands I squeeze their hands and they squeeze mine back so like I just feel like, connected to the team. Umm. I always—this is weird, but I always spit, at the end. I’ve done that ever since I was a freshman but that’s nothing about what the rest of us do. And then we just get together and do the cheer at the end…

M: Well then talk to me about what we do after the…

W: So after we get in [group comes in closely and raises one arm with the hand in a fist] and do the cheer together, [the cheer for this specific day was “Aggies on three! One, two three, Aggies!”] then I scream “can I get a whoop whoop” and then we go “whoop whoop” [me laughing about Wesley’s reenactment] and then I go—and then we all go CHAHO0, [phonetically sounds like chah-who] like deep in your lungs scream [more laughter] and umm just jog it back, get ready for the game.
The team kneeling for the prayer.

The team coming together for the cheer.

The team jogging back while saying “whoop whoop” and “chahoo.”

**Texture**

When I was interviewing Wesley, she was energetic as always. She did not mind sharing so our conversation was open and easy. She was talking pretty fast though I think because she just wanted to hurry through it and get back to whatever she was doing before.
There are different tones and textures throughout the different parts of this ritual. When the team first gathers for the prayer, there is a reverent tone. As Wesley mentioned, it is a way to connect with the team and calm down before the game. There is a feeling of “togetherness.” Everyone is silent except for the person praying, and the prayer is given in a respectful and reverent way. Wesley was certainly feeling emotional that day. She started to get choked up while saying the prayer and got a little bit teary eyed. When the prayer is finished, the mood changes instantly to one that is encouraging and excited. The team claps and yells encouragement like “Let’s get it” or “Let’s freaking go” as they gather close for the cheer. The volume of the speaking is louder and more intense. The volume of the group is increased again for the part of cheer Wesley leads. As she described earlier, the “chahoo” is done as a “deep in your lungs scream.” It seems to be a way to release built up energy and tension before the game. The game that I collected this folklore at was a little unique, as it was the Senior Game. Wesley commented on the emotions of the team going into this ritual, “We were way emotional that day. I think everyone was on edge because there was so much riding on that game. It wasn’t just senior day it was like if you win the game you go to the tournament if you don’t you don’t go. Senior game this could be our last game…everything’s the end. It was just an emotional day, so I felt like every aspect of the warm-up including the prayer was just more like everyone’s thoughts were more there and like everyone’s living in the moment more maybe?... So, that would probably be the difference for that day.”

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Introduction to Folklore/English 2210
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Fall 2017