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Utah State Women's Soccer Pre-Game Warm Up Handshakes

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Alecia Robinson

Logan, Utah

November 2017

Utah State Women's Soccer Pre-Game Warm Up Handshakes

Ritual

Informant

Alecia Robinson is nineteen years old. She was born in Provo, Utah and grew up in American Fork, Utah. She has been playing soccer since she was in third grade. She is currently a sophomore at Utah State University and is pursuing a degree in Technology Systems. Alecia played significant minutes for the USU soccer team her freshman and sophomore years as an outside forward. She is known on the team for her unique and outgoing personality, her love of guinea pigs, and her courage going into tackles on the field.

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 are clean, the lines and Utah State symbols on the field were freshly painted, and banners and flags lined the field. However, the weather on this day was very poor. It was dark, very cold, and alternating between rain, snow, and even hail, so there were also very few fans. This ritual is done before every single game, home or away. It is only done for games and not for practice. These handshakes are part of the very beginning of the warm up. The scoreboard counts down the time until kickoff, and at exactly thirty-three minutes the team begins warmup and starts doing the handshakes. This ritual ends after the last line sprint before the team breaks off into position specific warm-ups. Everyone on the team who is not injured participates in this folklore because even people who will not play in the game still warm up. During this part of the warm-up, there is still almost a half an hour until game time so there are hardly any fans watching and it is mostly the two teams, the coaches, and the staff on the fields.

I later interviewed Alecia about this ritual several weeks after the end of season. We are teammates and roommates, so we were talking over breakfast at the kitchen table in our home. The mood was cozy and comfortable because we know each other well and it was nice and warm in the top floor of our house.

Text

Alecia: Ok, after each, um, warm up activity we run back [sound of utensils scraping dishes] and we do a specific handshake according to what stretch or movement we just did [uh-huh] and it kind of? I don't know, it motivates me, i—it's like an indicator that it's game day, like let's go [both laughing together] um, yeah. [more laughter]

Me: Can you explain some of the handshakes to me?

Alecia: Ok, um, so we have the thigh slap where we go ‘huh’ and the, uh, foot one where [gestures side of feet hitting] where we hit the opposite foos of each other and, at the end we end with a chest bump and a good luck salmon, where you [Alecia giggling] put your hand in between someone’s thighs and salmon them. [holding hand out like about to give a handshake and waving back and forth to demonstrate and me laughing]

M: So explain to me what salmoning is.

A: A salmon is when you put your hand—your hand is a salmon and you’re going through somebody’s legs and slapping each side [laughter] multiple times.

M: [laughing] multiple times, nice. Ok, umm, who decides what the handshakes are gonna be

A: So the handshakes we try to stick to, a, order and most of the time we forget what they are, so the person in the front of—of the line decides what it is if we had forgotten. Most of the time it’s a routine.

M: Nice. And then, so, does every line do the same handshake?

A; No. So, every line is separate, and they have their own things, so, we will always have the same people in the same lines.

Note for Clarification: The person in the front of the line starts the handshake and then it is performed down the rest of the line. The handshakes are always accompanied by making some sort of verbal sound. There are four people to a line and the line leader cannot be a freshman. The team just gets into lines randomly for the first game, and they stay like that the rest of season.



This is the “thigh slap” Alecia talked about. The players will hit their inner thighs together and let out a deep grunt (“huh”). Down the line we have myself (Mealii Enos), Ashley Hughes, Alecia Robinson, and Amber Marshall.



This is the “foot clap” Alecia talked about. The players will hit the insides of their opposite feet together. They do the left foot and then the right foot while saying a high pitched “whoop whoop.”



This is the last part of the handshakes done after the last sprint in warm ups. The players will do a chest bump and say a deep “huh” as they hit chests.

Texture

This ritual is meant to be fun and silly. During the entire thing, the lines are talking and laughing. The handshakes and accompanying sounds are done with vigor and enthusiasm. Sometimes there is even a little confusion on what handshake is next and sometimes people mess up, but this is not a big deal. People will just laugh about the mess up and move on. The team does not seem to be uptight about getting this ritual exactly right or exactly the same every time. When I asked Alecia how she would feel if the team could no longer do the handshakes she said, “I would be really sad about that, because I think the handshakes make it fun. I kind look forward to that... it kinda gets pregame jitters out.” Getting the “pregame jitters out” seems to be the purpose behind this whole ritual. In the high stress environment of pregame warm up, the team can have small moments where they are laughing and having fun. This also gives a low stress routine to go along with the precise and exact routine of warm up. However, not all team members are on board with this ritual when they are first introduced to it. Alecia comments, “It was very weird when we first learned them. Because no other team does this, I’ve never seen them before and I thought we looked stupid, at first, but really it doesn’t matter because it’s really fun.”

The texture of the interview was very different than the texture of the ritual. The way Alecia answered made it apparent that sometimes she felt awkward trying to describe the handshakes outside of their normal context. This is also apparent in how many times we laugh throughout the interview. It is a silly ritual, so it felt weird to take it out of its normal environment.

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