Utah State Women’s Soccer Pre-Game Starter Circle

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Ritual

Informant

My name is Mealii Enos and I am twenty years old. I was born and raised in Highlands Ranch, Colorado. I moved to Logan, Utah in the summer of 2016 for my freshman year of college and have lived here since. I am a student-athlete at Utah State University, and I just finished my sophomore season on the women’s soccer team. I have absolutely loved my experience with Utah State Athletics thus far. I have been playing soccer since I was around ten years old and have been playing competitively since I was around thirteen years old. I am also an undergraduate at USU and double majoring in Special Education and Communicative Disorders.

Context

USU’s soccer team is Division 1, and we play in the Mountain West Conference. This means we play in the highest division of collegiate competition and play other universities in the mountain west area. This folklore is done before every game, at home or away. It is the very last thing that we do as a team before the whistle blows and the game starts. It also takes place before the whistle blows for the second half. If the game goes into over time we will also do this ritual before the start of each overtime period. The starters and only the starters for USU will participate. We huddle together on the half of the field that has the goal we will defend. The “starters” are the eleven players who will be playing for the team to start the soccer game.

Text

The starters will take the field after having a last cheer with the entire team. We will jog over to our side and circle up. Everyone puts their arms around each other and puts their right foot forward into the circle. The circle is super tight and close. During this time people will usually start saying encouraging things, or remind the team of things we need to remember for the game. Some examples of things people will say are “C’mon guys we got this” or “Let’s play our game.” Generally, upperclassmen and seniors will be talking during this time but anyone can talk. While people are talking, I will go around the circle, while still having my arms around the people next to me, and tap the top of everyone’s right cleat with my right cleat. Then someone in
the circle, it changes pretty much every time, will tap my right foot after I finish. I started doing this after a senior from last year, Karly, graduated. She used to do it every game so when she left I just started doing it. Then, the team will all bring in their hands to the middle, about chest height with the hands in fists and arms bent at the elbow. Someone, again it doesn’t really matter who, with say “Family on three. One, two, three” and then everyone says “family” together. Once or twice during the season this may change. We said “hurd up” one time after our coaches stated using that phrase. Then everyone breaks the circle and jogs to their starting position.

Texture

Because this ritual is done right before we start playing, emotions are high. Depending on the game, there are different attitude and tones during this ritual. For example, if it is the start of a game, the team can be excited, talkative, energetic, and positive. However, if we are about to start an overtime, this might be a little tenser and people might be talking more forcefully and intensely. If we are down a goal and are going into the second half, people may be more quiet and angry. Generally, the team tries to stay positive and get people hyped to play during this ritual. The cheer we do, family, is important to us because family is one of our team values. It is something we focus on often. We play together and play for each other and the cheer helps us remember that. The cheer is said at normal speaking level, we do not yell it like other cheers we do as a team. The foot tapping is just a little superstition that we have carried on.

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