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Utah State Women's Soccer Pre-Game Rituals from 2009-2012

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Natalie Norris

Athletic AcaLogan, Utah

November 10, 2017

Utah State Women's Soccer Pre-Game Rituals from 2009-2012

Ritual

Informant

Natalie Norris was a member of the Utah State Women's Soccer Team from 2009-2012. She was, and still is, one of the programs most high-profile players. She was a center-back. She won All-American accolades her senior season, the first in program history. Following her college career, she went on to play professional soccer in the National Women's Soccer League for Kansas City. However, after surgery on her calves, she declined to rejoin the team and instead went on to pursue her Masters at the University of Utah. She previously had earned her bachelors in Nutrition and Dietetics from Utah State. Now Natalie, commonly known as "Nano", works at Utah State as the Director of Sports Nutrition.

Context

I interviewed Natalie in her office in the Athletics Academic complex at USU. Her office is on the bottom floor of the Icon Fitness Center that the athletes use for working out. Natalie's life sized All-American poster hangs on the wall outside of this building. This floor is called the "Fueling Station" and is a cafeteria type place with healthy food options. Nano runs the Fueling Station and her office is immediately to the left when you walk in. Her door is always open, and athletes are walking in and out all the time. While I was talking to her, there were three of her assistants in her office as well, but they kept quiet and worked on their own computers. The Fueling Station was in open hours, and you could hear people talking and eating outside of the office. Nano sat at her messy desk, covered in papers and post it notes, and I sat at a chair to the side of it.

When these rituals were performed, they would have been done on the field, during pre-game warm-ups on the field at home and away games. They were almost exclusively amongst the players without the coaches involved and only before games. The Utah State Women's Soccer team was a D1 team during this time, and still is. D1 meaning Division 1, the highest division in college athletics. At this time, they competed in the WAC, the Western Athletic Conference.

Text

Nano: In the locker room we would always listen to music—I think a couple girls my age were the DJ's but we would always listen to "Man in the Mirror" by Michael Jackson that was a must.

[laughing at herself]

Mealii: That's crazy we still do that.

N: I think it's passed down from us. [yeah, laughing] yeah so that's a must and then, girls would have, it'd be Ashlyn and Kami and Genie having dance parties, or battles one of the two it was freakin funny... I would always have someone throw me headers, from rather large distances [laughing] so, um, and then I would I had to get at least a few good headers back but, that was like my thing, so if the girl who wasn't, who was throwing to me wasn't available or like was doing something else one of the coaches would come cause they all always knew that I had to do it. And then we would pray as a team around the center—er around the corner flag.

M: We still do that too

N: Yeah I'm glad that hasn't dropped [that's way cool] um and we would always cross our hands and hold hands like that [crosses arms and with palms facing up] [unintelligible] and then, um, the seniors would say a little something and then one of those people would do the cheer and then we'd—

M: What would you guys cheer?

N: Um. I think it was just 'Aggies' what do you guys cheer. [same] yeah I don't think it was a set thing... then we'd cheer all together as a team and then we always met as a starting eleven in the middle, and depending on the year was whoever spoke. I think I often spoke just cause I was kind of like the defensive captain the entire time I was here.

M: So usually just one person would talk?

N: Yeah, in the middle well, maybe two. But it was just like 'hey guys this is what we wanna do lets do this thing' kind of and, one year we all had our right feet in whenever that was happening,

and then one year we all switched to our left, and then one year we all had our arms around each other. Then we'd always cheer 'team' for the middle [desk chair squeaking]... oh and before the game started we would always lay out our jerseys on the bench.

Note: The interview goes on for much longer, but I wanted to focus specifically on pre-game rituals during warm-up with the team. Also, some of the things she talked about did not necessarily qualify as folklore as they were just things she did by herself. She talks a little bit about individual handshakes she had with people and pre-game snacks, and I did not include that. When I cut out some of these things it is indicated in the text by an ellipsis.

Texture

When I was interviewing Natalie, she seemed open and cheerful. She was happy to answer questions and seemed to be enjoying remembering all the things she used to do with her team. Sometimes she would pause for a moment and look like she was trying to remember exactly what happened. She talked at a normal speaking level and often rambled and spoke fast.

Much of this folklore seemed to be in place and carried on simply for tradition. When I asked Natalie how these rituals got started, she had no idea, she just said that most of them had been there when she got on the team. The interesting thing is that many of these rituals are still in place on the team today, now eight years later. Natalie viewed them as part of the warm up but not the most important part or entirely necessary. Many of these rituals seemed to be in place for superstition, and to have fun as a team and to come closer as a team. I asked her what would happen if they were not able to do these rituals before a game. Natalie said that some people were very superstitious and had to do things the exact same every time, but she did not share the same opinion. She mentioned that occasionally they would be rushed in warming up and couldn't do everything, and if they skipped a ritual she wouldn't care that much and just move on and focus on the game. Overall, Natalie said that the rituals were "mostly fun." She says that meeting as the eleven starters was "a little more serious" but that the overall goal was to "play hard but have fun play together as a team."

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