



January 27, 2012

Greetings!

I have trouble sitting and enjoying athletic contests. That goes for any sport, from CYO through the professional ranks, but it applies particularly to big high school games. I was an assistant coach for two sports for several years, a head coach for four years, an athletic director for seven years, and now a principal for five years. I tend to be a bit uneasy as I wait for something to go wrong. I am always looking around to make sure the officials showed up; the coaches and athletes have arrived and once the game starts, are keeping their cool; no parent is getting too loud or using abusive language in their discontent with the officials; and the student section is being appropriate and representing their school well.

This constant concern about something going wrong is well-founded. I have *experienced* things going wrong. I've been there when buses haven't arrived and when officials didn't show. I have seen coaches rant, rave, stomp, and scream before eventually being ejected. I have seen athletes get into fistfights. I have stepped in between an angry parent and an official. I have had to ask an adult fan (twice my size, I might add) from the visiting team to stop his behavior or be removed from the gym. I have seen the taunts between students of opposing schools get out of hand and end up with the students charging toward one another.

So I will admit, I was not overly excited about attending the Guerin Catholic versus Brebeuf basketball doubleheader last Friday night in our gym. It is a big rivalry, so I knew the students would be fired up. I knew the gym would be packed, increasing the chances of something going wrong. Both schools have solid athletic programs, so the games were sure to be hard-fought and the scores close.

I was correct. The students were definitely fired up. Over 300 students - that's right, *half* of our student population - overflowed their designated seating area. The rest of the bleachers were filled as well and it was standing room only. Included in the crowd were dozens of young cheerleaders from our deanery partner schools, who were taking it all in, seeing what Guerin Catholic was all about. The Golden Eagles, both the girls' team and boys' team, took care of business by winning their contests. As expected, the games were close and the intensity level was high throughout both contests.

But I need not have been concerned, because the problems of which I am always leery simply did not occur. It was a great evening - great crowd and great games. I am grateful to everyone who contributed to its success: The athletic department, Mr. Buhler, Mrs. Stanisz, and all of the volunteers; the administrators who helped provide supervision; the faculty and staff members who came to cheer on the teams; the coaches, teams, and cheerleaders who worked so hard and represented the school so well; the adult fans from both schools; and the Brebeuf students.

But most importantly, I could not have been more proud of the Guerin Catholic students. Their spirit and energy were unbelievable. Thanks to outstanding senior leadership and their efforts to organize, the cheers were loud, creative, and shouted in unison. It was fun to witness. I found myself, at least temporarily, not worried about what might happen, as we administrators and parents are prone to do.

So *this* is what it feels like to enjoy a high school basketball game.

Peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rick Wagner".

Rick Wagner
Principal,
St. Theodore Guerin High School