

Sarah Laughlin

English H 2, Block 2

Writing Workout due 9/28/07

The 7th and 8th Grade Boys Football Team. But By “Boys”, I Mean Boys and a Girl:

Personal Narrative

We all put our hands in the middle, ready for the on 3 “TIGERS!” chant that had become so innate to us. Andrew looked up, his face wrinkled in confusion, and then let loose in relief he muttered, “Whoa, for a second I forgot there was a girl on this team. I was wondering why there was one hand with painted pink nails!” The guys laughed, and I smiled, once again reminded how cool it was I was different. “1, 2, 3, TIGERS!” and we were off.

My adventures as the solo girl on my all boys middle school football team were always interesting. When I signed up at the end of 6th grade, intending to play the fall of 7th grade, it raised a few eyebrows. Football is known as being predominantly male. As females, we’re deemed weaker, more breakable, and just not made for sports like football. But I love sports. Ever since I could walk I could get around the bases, and ever since I could talk I could call out a blitz. My dad is a huge sports fan, and many Saturday afternoons were spent playing wiffle ball in the yard or watching the sox. Sports were in my blood. I have 3 brothers, so you would think being the only girl I’d the little princess, and love girly things. But my dad didn’t skimp on making me the absolute sports lover. So naturally, I eventually noticed football looked pretty darn fun. I’d play catch with my friends, and sometimes my older neighbors let me participate in the neighborhood games, but I really didn’t know too much about it. So when signups came for the 7th and 8th

grade team, I figured why not? It looks really fun, and who says a girl can't do it? Part curiosity, part stubbornness to prove myself, I signed up. And that's how it all happened.

So back to grade 7. It had been a few weeks and for the most part the guys were great. Though it was strange for them to have me there, and a few cringed when they heard they'd be tackling a girl, they got used to it. The coaches treated me like anyone else, and the boys learned to also. I did the drills, I pushed the sled, I tackled people, I got tackled (ouch). The only time I'd notice I was different was when I was changing at the high school girls locker room instead of the field house, and that was for obvious reasons. Or occasionally at practice, when I'd look around and see 35 boys and me, the one you could always pick out of the crowd because my long, black hair swept down my back. (Yup, that one's definitely a girl.) By the way, long hair under a football helmet, not a good time. The plus of being the only girl on an all guy team? you don't have to wear a cup! That's always nice. But really, it was all a blast. Being "one of the guys" is a great, prideful, fun thing to be. Being a part of that team filled me with so much happiness. It was all fun and games. Well, except for the rigorous obstacle course we would do, comprised of pushups, to running, to tackling pads, then sit-ups, followed by high knees through the ropes, backpedaling and karaoke around some cones, and oh, then some more pushups. And then there were the numerous "patriots" we had to run. A "patriot" is running the width of the football field, then back, then there, then back again. So all in all, one patriot was maybe 200 yards. But then figure in the sprinting, and the fact you were laced up knee to shoulders in pads, and had a huge clunky helmet reverberating off of your sweaty head, it kind of sucked. By the time I got home every night, my body literally crumbled into my bed. But it was all worth it.

Game days were everyone's favorite. We had a pretty good team, and some great coaches. Coach Johnson was the head coach of lineman, and was a tall, large, foreboding

man who had a loud voice and wasn't afraid to use it. He assumed the position of leadership between the two coaches, and placed us all where we needed to go. The other coach was Coach Mosca, a short, strong Italian man, who was less of a head coach during practice, but you did not want to cross him. When Mosca yelled, he was heard from here to Timbuktu. Also when Mosca yelled, we knew we were in for some extra laps. Both coaches were tough on us, but as equally hilarious as tough. During practice we could usually get off with goofing around a bit, because the coaches were jokesters themselves. But game day, that meant business.

The night before a game you would have your mom wash your pants and jersey so you looked extra crisp and clean. So we'd suit up in our bleached white pants, and pumpkin orange jerseys, ready to brown them with mud, dirt, or whatever kind of crap we rolled around in while on the field. I would change in my locker room at the high school, then travel up to the field house where the bus would be waiting. Right before every game an exception was made to the no-girls-in-the-boys-field-house rule, and they would usher me into the field house. Sitting around that small, cramped, blinding orange room, inhaling the putrid smell of teenage boys' sweat, wet grass, and dirty socks, everything felt right. Anticipation and excitement clouded the air. The silence, filled only by the soft tying of cleats and heavy breathing of my fellow teammates, was more soothing to me than any ocean could ever be. Coach would get us all together, we'd talk about what we were setting out to do, and we'd once again shout "TIGERS!" uttering the word with such passion you'd think we were saying "GOD!" or "I LOVE YOU!" I remember on the way out of the field house we'd all tap this big tiger paw above the doorway for good luck. But there was this one guy James on the team who was really short, so he had to jump from a bench in order to reach the big paw. We'd file out,

tapping the paw as we went, and when he came to the door he'd hop up onto that bench and smack the paw, with all the pride he had. Then we'd be off to the game

From the sideline to the huddle to the halftime speech to the last play, clock runs out, line up and shake hands with the other team, it was an adventure. It was a sport of passion, pride, brotherly (and in this case sisterly) love, and being a team player. When coach made us run laps because someone swore, or one of us didn't wear a mouth guard or fumbled the ball, you'd often hear someone saying, "Nick, you idiot!" or "Thanks a lot Brett!" Coach would hear the complaints, and he'd always respond, "Hey! Stop your talking! We win as a team, we lose as a team; we succeed as a team and we are punished as a team!" To practice well and to play well we needed to work as a team. So as different as I was being the only girl, it didn't matter. There is no "I" in team. Football isn't about one person. It is a team sport. One person, one girl, one whatever, is not a big thing. Because I wasn't simply the single girl, playing with a bunch of boys. I was a part of the team. I was on the 7th and 8th grade boys (and me!) football *team*. And it rocked.