

The Night the Spirits Rose

Helmets, masks, and COVID unmasked by school spirit during Cheyenne Mountain's first football game.

No doubt this game will go down in history. Not for the win. In fact, we took a loss. A hard, colossal dent. One big mighty body slam. Any bystander would gawk at the numbers emblazoned on the maroon board, 0-42, the time ticking and glaring in red.

Cheyenne had their first high school home game on Friday, October 9 against Pueblo West. The turnout was far from drab. A dizzying rate of Cheyenne fans had come out to support our team. Due to restrictions, the school was allowed 150 lucky students to attend, yet they made up for the loss and filled the stadium with excitement and hair-raising roars.

What the football players lacked in points, they gained in character and at the end of the day, no virus is going to bar their morale.

A swift player with morals as hefty as his heart, senior varsity football player, Carter Cayton, #62, is proud to characterize football as a kinship.

"Football is a brotherhood. To me, it means you're a part of a second family. And to play for Cheyenne with a group brave enough to play, it is an honor," said Carter Cayton.

From the football clan on their last leg, to the cheering and enduring fans, each player knew they were not alone.

Junior Patrick O'Donnell said it best: "As I was on the field and I looked into the stands, it was so amazing to see all of the people there, the fact that they were still willing to come out and support us was just the best feeling."

In the middle of a raging pandemic, one wouldn't think that high school football would be a possibility or even a thought in people's heads, yet the unbelievable does happen.

What they can't ogle at is the burning spirit in the football players' hearts even as the board silently screamed its last few seconds. The fierce, steadfast, and dogged gleam in their eyes never left.

"My favorite part about coming out here tonight is feeling like last year again. Just being able to be with my friends and watching the team play. It's a comfort thing in a way," said senior and fan Julian Webber.

* * *

A teenager's ability to hang out, go to the movies, go to dinner, date, joy ride, scream the music, are just as important as breathing itself. COVID world ripped teens apart. Bear Creek and Gold Camp Road hangouts forbidden, masked smiles, huggless existence.

"The worst part of Corona is the restrictions on practices, and having to wear masks when not playing," said Patrick O'Donnell.

There's not just restrictions on the players and their practices, there's restrictions on our teenhood.

Deprived of the match left frayed hearts. Losing the closeness, the bond, the teenage spirit from the festivity. The school's first game helped to patch the gap the student's held in their souls.

Friday night's football game was the end of this dark and lonely tunnel. It gave students a form of hope that maybe this year isn't so different from the last.

Regardless of the rough score and our men scuffling in boundaries of artificial turf, each number paraded the field slapping each other's padded shoulders and refusing to leave even a shred of dignity behind.

Parents heartily wore their son's white ribbons affixed upon their breast, as they shared each intensity that they felt - the highs of happiness, the deep lows of sadness, the anguish, the emotions. The ribbons did not symbolize that they were simply a proud parent of a Cheyenne student. They symbolized endurance, determination, and loyalty.

* * *

Despite the lack of snacks, the lack of the screams from the stands, and the losing scoreboard above, Pep band performed with spirit and pride during the first game of the season, playing "Cheyenne Will Shine" with unshakeable rhythm.

The students, especially the low brass section, danced to the beat while the drum line pounded their tunes.

The entirety of the band was a sea of maroon, white, and flashy Hawaiian beach clothes, a theme the band director Ms. Matzke started at her previous schools.

Despite being a requirement Pep band quickly becomes a way to show school spirit.

Sixty-five band members, armed with instruments, went to Pep band to show their enthusiasm and encouraged the football team and boosted the atmosphere of the crowd.

Symphonic band euphonium player and sophomore Jonathan Gomez sheds some light on the experience. He "loves having fun and playing and spending time with friends."

Gomez notes that it gets very cold very quickly while playing outside. But despite the bitter cold, the band's spirits never freeze.

The players socially distanced and wore masks, but one could hear the chatter and feel the silent buzz of excitement wafting through the air. The vibrant mood amongst the dark night, the lively tone, and the instruments shining like gold, colors ablaze like in the bell-shaped moon.

According to Ms. Matzke, Pep band is even more important than this year ever before.

"Pep band brings normalcy to the people at the game during the crazy of COVID-19. It helps the spectators feel a little like before despite everything that has changed," Ms. Matzke said

The stimulating music wasn't the only element that provided some normality that bright night. The cheerleaders brought new meaning to cheering. It's not just wearing the pleated mini skirt or adorning their high-tied hair with glimmering crowns. It's defining what it means to build character, share energy, and retain vigor.

Head captain cheerleader and senior Isabel Lopez said, "It was very difficult not being near the students and not being able to lead them in cheers and interact with them." They stood behind the goal posts, away from the stands. In front of them, a black safety net, cutting them off from the peppy crowd.

Even with such a devastating score they were not disheartened, cheering as loud as they could. In near perfect sync, their silver pom-poms swayed with each movement. The strands glistening in the stadium light, drawing the audience's attention and lightening their heavy hearts.

The distance from the audience didn't alter a thing. They still cheered and encouraged our battle worn warriors from a safe distance. Despite less practices during the week due to COVID, the routines still maintained and served their purpose.

Their enthusiasm resonates in the audience's hearts as they cheer along with them and offer as much support as they can. Parents held the eucalyptus rose bouquets with care as a representation of the children they raised. They bloomed into the beautiful cheerleaders that spread the spirit no matter what the score board looked like.

When interviewed on the principles of a cheerleader, Isabel Lopez stated that, "A cheerleader builds school spirit and represents her school and team any time she's in uniform."

And they did exactly that, even in the face of utter defeat they built school spirit and represented our boys.