

I Am Determined

The sound of screaming girls, whistles being blown, cheers being yelled, and parents clapping, blurred together in a crowded gym of chaos. "Okay girls, this is the last game of this Las Vegas tournament. Leave it all on the court," said my coach, trying her best to seem enthusiastic. Well, she was right, if we lost this game, we would go home. No other games, no chances to referee, just the eight hour drive back to San Diego, and I was not going to let that happen. A fire started in me and I knew I wasn't going to be the team going home.

Our volleyball team had driven or flown to Las Vegas to compete in the Junior National qualifier. How well we did on the first two days, would impact on how we did on the last, which was the game we were facing that day. My team started the tournament on a rough start. Sami, our outside hitter, had just experienced a shoulder injury the day before. She was one of the players who was the glue keeping us together, and without her, the team-- even my coaches--had doubts. All of my teammates were tired and burnt out. Three days of waking up at five a.m. and playing for six hours straight is a lot for us, even me. These factors made me want to fight and persevere more than ever for this last game.

We entered the gym and headed to our court. "Head to court 26 ladies!" called my coach. My teammates vented on how nervous they were, and how if Sami wasn't going to play, we weren't going to win. I was shocked at the mindset of my teammates. We started to warm up and survey our competitors. They looked very good, but I didn't let that phase me. What mattered was how I played my game and led my team along. The first whistle blew, indicating for the first serve to proceed. I bounced the ball five times--my service routine. I served the ball over and the team quickly sided out, scoring the first point of the game.

The first seven points were a struggle for us. No one could get a kill (a point earned by a hit/spike). Those seven points were very frustrating for me, knowing that my team could perform way better.

Coach Wendy pulled me to the side, "Ever, just dump the next ball." I nodded in approval, but deep inside I had faith in my teammates to score a point. I set Shay a ball, and she finally got a kill. I looked over to the sidelines and the coaches were giggling and giving me a dirty look, since I didn't obey the feedback Coach Wendy told me. The set went by in a whirlwind. Twenty-five to eleven. The second set was pointless for my teammates. They wanted to go home. I didn't though. I was the only one pushing. Pushing for my teammates to have energy. Pushing to win. Pushing for hope.

It was hard being the only person on the court with that hunger. I knew Sami had the hunger, but she was helpless on the sidelines with her injured shoulder. I pulled my team to the side, "Guys! You have to push! Look at their weaknesses and keep putting pressure on those areas. Keep serving hard! The game is not over," I emphasized. By now, the score was twenty-one to thirteen. We had finally gotten our flow in the last minute, but we kept playing, although the set was close to being over. I remember the last play clearly as a sunny day with no clouds in sight.

I remember Shay getting a block touch that was high and I had gotten the first contact, making me out of the play. Then it was over the second it had begun. Eva and Olivia let the ball drop out of miscommunication. The ball was on the floor and everything went silent except for the ball bouncing away. *Bounce, Bounce, Bounce...* I hit the ground with my hands in frustration, but I knew I did the best I could. The opposing team cheered and they would move on to their next game.

Tears were shed, hugs were going around, and everyone started packing up for home. While

balling their eyes out, players hugged their parents as they told them they were proud of them. I needed no one to tell me I did an amazing job because I knew I did myself. Coach Ashli gave me a hug and said I did great and that I should be proud of myself. I thanked her, and even though I didn't show my pain on the outside, I still did hurt on the inside. A loss was still a loss. In the end, even though my team didn't win, I showed an example of me being determined in any circumstance and I'm proud of myself for doing so.