

I Am Competitive

'Brrrr!'

The last whistle. Score 25-23. Ball on the floor.

I just stand there as the other team celebrates their win. It was the last game of the tournament, winner takes all. You lose, you leave. I have barely any time to collect my thoughts when the next team rushes onto the court to start warming up, a sudden burst of energy in the weight of losing. The Mandalay Bay Convention center is cold. Too cold. As the adrenaline wears off, I realize the temperature. I could put on a jacket. No. I have to keep my jersey on. I have to hold on to those last moments of the game.

By now, the rest of my team is huddled in the corner. All the moms are giving notes of sympathy. Things like,

"You worked so hard."

"I'm so proud of all of you."

"You'll beat them next time."

But I've heard it all. At this point I tune out all the noise and focus on the chaos in my own head.

I can feel the water from my eyes drip onto my cheeks. This happens every time. Every single time. Whenever we suffer a hard loss I always get so emotional. But for what? Literally what reason?

Other girls don't cry as much. Why do I start bawling my eyes out every time we let a ball drop?

Its a stupid thing, really. I give all this time and energy to an extreme version of, *don't let the balloon touch the floor.*

But maybe there is a reason. Why I supposedly 'like' volleyball anyway. Why I even make an effort. Why I physically and mentally hurt my body. Why I spend countless hours practicing for a win that at the end of the day, isn't even guaranteed. Why I make this sport my whole life.

But does it have to be?

It's for the love of the game right?

Right?

As I walk out of the convention center into the boiling heat of Nevada, this question is the only thing on my mind.

And after a long, long while, I've finally come to a conclusion.

Yes.

It's not just for the love of the game, it's for yourself. And it's not just my life, it's my family.

And as much as it hurt, this game proved to me just how much that sport means to me.

Because I'm competitive, I'm passionate, and I love what I do.

And mistakes are just part of the game.

As cheesy and cliché as it sounds, it really is *for the love of the game*.

Volleyball is something that keeps me going. It's something that gets me out of bed in the morning. It's the community, the teammates, the culture, the support.

I cry because I care.

And I think caring is what's going to drive me throughout my whole life. Through club, to highschool volleyball, to D1 scholarships, and tomorrow.

And to me, as well as so many other athletes, caring is just as good as winning.