

Take Me Out of the Ballet— and Back to the Ball Field

One mother's perspective of stage versus stadium

by: Julie Smith Costakis, mom of 3



Spirited fan loyalty toward the outstanding sports teams in Hamilton County is deeply imbedded in its culture. Growing up in Carmel, although busy with dance, music, academics and later my high school job at a local theatre, my allegiance to Greyhound athletics ran deep. This enthusiasm carried over to Purdue, and was a likely tipping point for my sports-loving college sweetheart when he asked me to marry him. We eventually settled in Hamilton County where our sons learned to toss a ball and cheer in the stands before they could walk. My time formerly engaged as a patron of the arts was replaced with football, basketball, lacrosse, soccer, baseball, bowling and tennis competitions. "When will I ever attend the ballet?" was my frequent question, inciting a round of laughter from the guys. On Christmas, I received an answer. My husband and now grown sons presented me with a special gift: a written proclamation that after enduring years of male-dominated events, I was the recipient of the ultimate "Ladies Day Out": a certificate to my favorite day spa, elegant dinner reservations and center tier box tickets to the Russian ballet.

Anticipation of the event was as enjoyable as observing their pride in thoughtful planning. How delightful to don my heels, little black dress and favorite jewels. My friend and I were chauffeured through the picturesque snow to the restaurant, and later to the grand entrance of The Center for the Performing Arts. The ambiance of The Palladium was simply wondrous and the ballerinas exquisite. Yet an unsettling realization began to dawn. The long awaited ballet, despite its perfection, was not evoking the familiar thrill and satisfaction of competitive sports!

Would my perspective have differed with a daughter engaged in ballet? Whatever the reason, I eventually embraced the reality that I might prefer a stadium to a stage. A leather ball to a lace-trimmed

tutu, and an athlete decked out in shoulder pads and team jersey to one wearing purple leotards and a sequined vest. My kind of star laces up Nike shoes, not satin slippers. He braves a real opponent, keenly aware of the potential for agonizing defeat, yet the possibility of glorious victory.

I delighted in the ballet and return to the theatre after too long an absence. Yet celebrating and sharing my sons' enthusiasm for athletics has deeply impacted me. I have also savored their stage debuts, art exhibitions and academic award ceremonies. Yet the happiest times have been at the athletic fields, gymnasiums, tennis courts, ski slopes and sport complexes across this country. I would easily trade my high heels for boots dusted with stadium dirt, and my silk wrap for a treasured team logo jacket. Cheering for my sons from a blanket on a wooden set of bleachers elicits more joy than clapping politely from coveted velvet theatre seats.

Have I lost perspective as to which cultural events are worthwhile? Or are the more likely answers that shared family experiences are genuinely fulfilling, and the price of motherly-sacrifice well worth the reward? I need not choose—the arts touch my soul, while the interests of the men in my life fuel my heart. I will embrace and enjoy each experience on its own merits, in its proper season.

As our sons now leave the nest, I do not regret one moment we invested in their lives and passionate endeavors. My little leaguers have become a high school and college varsity athlete; our oldest now launched in his career. The future will certainly include athletics, yet promises more time for artistic performances—hopefully with the addition of daughters-in-law and granddaughters by my side!