

Coach Guyla Smith: Grit and Greatness

By David Truitt, Superintendent

Back in 2015, authors, Linda Kaplan Thaler and Robin Koval, wrote a book titled, "Grit to Great: How Perseverance, Passion, and Pluck Take You from Ordinary to Extraordinary". In this book, the authors contend that "grit" is what truly sets apart those who achieve their goals and those who do not. Through their research of organizations and competitions where the stakes were high, they found that talent and intelligence were not as strong of a determining factor of success as grit. Motivation and perseverance were the key!

People who are gritty are not afraid to fail. They do not view failure as a permanent state, which enables them to pick themselves up, brush off the dirt, and try again. They are determined and always keep their eyes on the goal.

When I think of grit, I love the analogy of the oyster and the pearl. I view grit as tiny particles of crushed rock. The oyster then reminds us that without grit, there is no pearl. In West, we have a living example or story of "grit to greatness" leading our West High School Lady Trojan Softball program. Every day, Coach Guyla Smith gives her all for her student athletes and West. I believe Coach Smith embodies the true definition of grit.

Grit – noun. Courage and resolve. Strength of character and will. Moral fiber. Steel. Nerve. Fortitude. Determination. Tenacity. See Coach Guyla Smith.

Last Friday night, April 8, 2016, before the start of the softball game versus Clifton High School, the West ISD leadership team, Board of Trustees, staff, and current and former players and coaches gathered to honor Coach Smith for recently becoming the all-time winningest coach in Texas High School softball history.

Back on February 27, a 10-2 victory for the Lady Trojans over Magnolia High School secured Coach Smith's 575th career coaching victory. This win moved her ahead of Coach Benita Dunlavy of Tomball High School on the all-time wins list.

A native of Pennsylvania, Coach Smith played two years at Penn State and coached Amateur Softball in Texas. She began her career in West ISD in 1989 coaching volleyball, basketball, and track and teaching social studies. Coach Smith founded the West High School softball program as a club sport in 1991. The team went 15-5 in their inaugural season, and in 1994, the program transitioned to a full UIL team sport.

To date, Coach Smith and her teams have earned twelve district championships, five trips to the state tournament with three runner-up finishes. Her teams have never suffered a losing season and have hit the 20-win mark 17 times. Coach Smith has an all-time record of 585 wins and 178 losses and has coached 38 TX SWA All-State Softball Team Members and 26 TGCA All-State Selections. Six of her players have played in the state All-Star Game, and 14 players have been named to the All-State Tournament Team list.

Coach Smith credits her team's success to "...always playing the game hard and being fundamentally sound." She believes, "If you do the small things right, the big things will happen." Her dream is to... "lift the state championship trophy this season." This current team is talented, determined, and full of grit, so I have no doubts that greatness awaits.

In the movie, "League of their Own," there is a classic line by the Tom Hank's character, Jimmy Dugan. Coach Dugan says, "Of course, it's hard. It's supposed to be hard. If it wasn't hard, everyone would do it. The hard... is what makes it great." Coach Smith makes the "hard" look easy, and I believe her players feed off this mentality.

Over the years, Coach Smith and her teams have played 763 games and practiced thousands of hours. She started the program from scratch as a club sport, persevered through the transition of the program gaining UIL status, and has never had a losing season in 26 years of coaching. Her players have won team and individual district, state, and national accolades, and some have even played at the collegiate level.

If you ask her current and former players, they describe her as dedicated, determined, and driven. They mention her smile and strength of character. They also talk about how badly they want to please and play hard for her. When I think about all the kind words, respect, and appreciation shown for Coach Smith, I think of one word... grit! Her grit is what helps make Lady Trojan softball truly great.

Congratulations to Coach Smith and the past and current West High School Lady Trojan Softball players and coaches! Our community is blessed because of your grit!