

My youngest daughter Kelly plays fast pitch softball for a team based in southeastern Pennsylvania called SCC S.W.A.T. (Softball With Attitude and Teamwork). It was a team formed 2 years ago and one of the things that immediately struck me as special was the fact that only two of the 12 girls go to the same school, and 9 of the 12 came from open tryouts as only the three coach's daughters formed the start. Fate brought these great athletes together and they began a bond that has fascinated us parents as we have watched them play and grow together. Their resilience and never quit attitude propelled them to three tournament championships in their first year, and three 2<sup>nd</sup> place tournament finishes and one tournament championship in their first year of 14U eligibility. This team of mostly 13 and one 14 year olds is considered a young team in 14U competition.

During the 2015/2016 season, their success qualified them to play in the USSSA World Series, being hosted in Ocean City Maryland. This is a 5 day event in mid-July, featuring 84 teams from across the East Coast and into Ohio and Indiana as well as Canada. The format is 1 day of three games to determine a seeding within brackets and then bracket playoff style continues for the next four days. To put it in perspective, the famed NCAA March madness is a 68 team single elimination tournament played over several weeks. The USSSA World Series is an 84 team double elimination format played in four days. The former, played inside air conditioned gyms; the latter is played outside in mid-July heat and humidity. It is a test of endurance, leadership, and most of all teamwork.

There are two main brackets – a winner's bracket, for teams with no losses, and a loser's bracket - for teams with one loss. The earlier you go into the loser's bracket, the more games you play. Once you lose two, you are out. The loser's bracket (unlike our budgets) is constantly funded with new teams coming from the winner's bracket. Eventually, there is a final 4 which is played on Sunday. If you make the final 4, you have accomplished something special.

There are 21 pools with 4 teams in each. The SCC S.W.A.T. team earned the number three seed in their bracket from pool play on Wednesday. On the first day, rain caused the 3<sup>rd</sup> and final game to be delayed and then moved to a different venue thirty five minutes away. The team didn't get back to the hotel until after 11pm. Little did we know this would be a harbinger.

On Thursday, SWAT won the first game, and a win in the the second game would finish the games for the day and kept them in the winner's bracket. A loss would force two more games later in the day. In that second game on Thursday, SWAT lost 6 - 3 to a very tough team, also from Pennsylvania, and was sent to the loser's bracket. The team had to prepare for two more games that day and face being sent home if they lost one. Going to the loser's bracket this early in a tournament this large, is like a death sentence for your chances of making it to Sunday. The sheer number of games that would have to be won in a row is daunting. Not to mention playing them in 95 degree heat and 90% humidity.

Immediately, these girls set goals for themselves. "Let's make it to Saturday" became the mission. I can tell you the parents were dubious at best, with some discussing alternate plans for the weekend. Thursday afternoon they stepped up to the challenge and won the two games needed to stay in against teams from NY and Ohio.

On Friday, there were two more games scheduled. Again, a loss and they are out. The mission continued – make it to Saturday. Game one on Friday was a nail biter with SWAT winning it 5 to 4 in the last inning against a NJ team. However, as game two against a PA team began, more adversity hit. The SWAT head coach (and most experienced) left the dugout early in the game with what looked like heat exhaustion or dehydration. This is when I saw the qualities of each and every person and player associated with this team. Immediately, the assistant coaches took charge on the field. The girls helped calm the coach's daughter (our second baseman) who was obviously concerned about her dad. They supported her and kept her focused and positive. Several parents attended to the coach and others helped the assistant coaches. That game ended in a 7 nothing win. They achieved their goal; they made it to Saturday... Time to set more goals. I watched as the girls huddled after the game and talked about what they wanted to do. They knew they had to play five games straight on Saturday to continue. "Make it to Sunday" became the new mission.

At 6am Saturday morning, my phone rang. It was the assistant coach, "Tom, do you have a shirt with a SWAT logo on it?" I replied "yes". "Good, can you wear it today, I may need some help". That same call went to a couple other dads as well. The head coach was admitted to the hospital and would not be able to return to the tournament. Everyone jumped in to help whether it was coordinating rides, food, laundry, and many other things, whatever was needed.

Saturday was going to be a marathon if the girls were going to obtain their goal. We were at the field at 8:15am, and if they were going to make it to Sunday, they would be there for thirteen more hours. Game one started with an 11-0 win and game two featured a 7-4 win both over PA teams. In game three, once again they showed commitment to each other against a NJ team when in the 2<sup>nd</sup> inning our right fielder grounded to first, and the first baseman applied the tag in, let's say, an "aggressive manner". Although there were two outs, the girls picked up their team mate and put four runs on the board before the inning ended. They never backed down and won it 6 to 5 in a tough battle.

With two more games to go we figured fresher teams would be coming out of the winner's bracket, we knew it would get tougher. However, the heat and humidity were having an effect on other teams, but somehow the SWAT girls played hard through it. In game four, a visually exhausted Delaware team took the field and SWAT cruised to an 8-2 victory.

The fifth and final game of Saturday against a Maryland team was probably the most memorable game to me and one that again showed the character of the girls. The game began with a 2-2 tie after the first inning when a Maryland player knocked one out of the park for their two runs. SWAT then put up five runs in the second, but Maryland contested a call and the mood turned very sour. In the fourth inning the Maryland team began to heckle our pitcher by hurling verbal abuse and shaking bottles filled with quarters. Our oldest girl, playing left field at the time, came in and politely asked the umpire to stop the harassment. The Maryland team ended up tying the game in that frame and there was only time for one more inning. A clearly focused and determined group of SWAT batters went to the plate for some revenge on how they treated their teammate. I was impressed, they didn't lower themselves to the other standard, and they stood tall and delivered by batting around and putting 6 runs on the board in the top of the inning. The bottom of the inning was a non-event with a strike out, ground ball and pop out to finish it 13 to 7.

They made it to Sunday. They won nine elimination games in a row in brutal heat and made it to the final four and they weren't done yet. On Sunday morning, SWAT was going to face that same Pennsylvania team that put them in the loser's bracket. This time SWAT had a lovely parting gift for them, a 7-0 shutout. There were only three teams left; SWAT had survived 10 straight elimination games.

Unfortunately, the ride ended there as SWAT was bested by another Pennsylvania team in a 9-2 defeat taking 3<sup>rd</sup> place for the World Series.

In the end, these girls were the talk of the tournament. Everywhere we went, people talked about the amazing run the girls were on. For all of their effort and perseverance beginning with the loss of their coach for the tournament, playing out of the loser's bracket from essentially the beginning, and the way they conducted themselves on and off the field, it was a unanimous decision by the tournament committee that the 14U SCC SWAT girls earned the additional honor of winning the Sportsmanship Award for the tournament. Here is an email from a coach that affirms how special it was.

*"Hello Darren, I hope this email finds you well at home after a long week. My name is Coach \_\_\_\_\_, coach of the \_\_\_\_\_. We played in Salisbury for the USSSA World Series. We did not play your team however I wanted to take the time to congratulate you on one hell of a run! My team and I were following your truly epic run. SSC Swat was the talk of our team and parents starting on Friday and we were all saddened to see your loss in the loser's bracket championship. We were still texting each other about it last night. Your 10 win streak on elimination games is truly impressive and we have the utmost respect and admiration for you and your team. Winning 5 games on that steamy Saturday is absolutely incredible, your team should be extremely proud of themselves.*

*Congrats on a great season and good luck in the future! Best, Coach \_\_\_\_\_"*

To the young ladies of SCC SWAT 14U – 2015/2016, I offer you the following thoughts that you, your coaches and your parents reminded me of during the week of the USSSA World Series 2016.

1. Never give up, be resilient and persevere. You will go further than you ever thought you could. Have confidence in yourself and your team.
2. When your teammate isn't being treated right, or is dealing with a crisis, put them on your back and carry them forward. This is how teams win.
3. Always have high character, never stoop to behavior that doesn't match your standards and surround yourself with high character people. Integrity is something never to compromise.
4. Live life with passion and purpose.
5. Enjoy the moment, you never know when you will be back.
6. Great leadership always prepares others to perform in their absence.
7. Be grateful. You have great families that will do anything for you and have enabled this tremendous opportunity. Not everyone has a family like yours.

(Kelly's dad)



WWW.USSSA.COM  
 Fast-Pitch Girls 14 & Under B  
 USSSA National Championship Northeast -- 7/19/2016  
 84 Teams -- Double Elimination  
 Printable Version



Losers Bracket [Click here for Winners Bracket](#)

