

I am sure anyone who read the newspaper or followed sports in Bakersfield during 1986-1989, girls' sports would be highlighted and North High would be one of the prominent high schools in California producing female athletes for college. One of those who blazed a huge trail was our own, JoEllen Jeffrey. I wanted to wait for a little bit after learning of the 2018 Hall of Fame induction to compose some thoughts and reflections regarding JoEllen and the incredible impact she has had for thousands in one sport in particular - Volleyball. I feel the need to do this because the majority of these reflections differ from what the public will remember. When the public thinks of JoEllen, they think of an unheralded recruit who came from North High as an unknown quantity. Very shortly in college, inflicted with a knee injury and despite the tragedy, made her way into playing Div I Volleyball at the University of Houston. The public would also be quick to point out that JoEllen had many honors in high school, such as MVP for volleyball and basketball her junior and senior years- noting the District MVP for girls' basketball her senior year. She was also honored with first team all-district honors her junior and senior seasons, Here the public is remembering JoEllen, the athlete. What I wanted to reflect on was JoEllen, the person. For anyone who was associated with her during high school would be greatly dwarfed compared to now. The memories and impacts she has had on a national scale with volleyball seem to always have more to do with JoEllen, the person. JoEllen, the athlete, was incredible. JoEllen, the person, however, is special...really special.

What I see is this picture: someone who competed at the absolute highest intensity and, because of her struggles and pains from the world around her that didn't allow for much hope; built a life over the past 23 years that she can stand proudly on. You would have to understand the magnitude of what was inside this woman years ago at North High and how it translates to this: over 23 years, she has guided a nationally ranked sports club with 28 volleyball teams of girls each year, that range from 10yr olds to 18yr olds and create a funnel that creates opportunity; it creates hope. You see 95% of the athletes that come to play for her club are awarded college scholarships. If you do the math, that's over 60,000 female athletes in 23 years, give or take. Now let's take a look back at the person, the young girl who came from a family with a hostile past, and not ever hearing the phrase "I'm proud of you," or "you've got a bright future ahead of you." As a young girl you innately see and feel all the obstacles that you live in. That your home may be more dangerous to spend time in than be somewhere else. And when your worth is so lowly regarded that you tend to believe their claims that you won't matter. No one overcomes ALL of these things. It is simply too much to overcome, too many obstacles. No one does this...and this is not just another story of a person with a broken background that made it. This is a story of an accomplishment only someone with her character and the help of a special coach could have done. You see, one coach came along and said that it was going to work out. That she would be great and that he was proud of her. In fact, JoEllen has kept every letter that Coach DeRossett ever wrote her. It was the first time someone saw something special in her and that coach decided to help guide her through the challenge of becoming more than her surroundings. From being lifted up in this manner, JoEllen burned it deeply on her heart to do the same for others. Not just because of a game, but because the profound combination of her conviction to help other girls who may just need that

person to come along and have the same impact with the same character. This was what made JoEllen so special.

I first played with JoEllen at North High as a teammate. First, she knew how good she was, and if you could not figure it out, then that was your problem. She was always self-assured in her greatness as a player and genuineness as a competitor. The great thing about Jo was where this self-assurance came from. It came from her genuineness as a person and competitor, not from her wins and losses. I later came to the realization that the victories that meant the most to her were the ones that also meant something to someone else. She was the ultimate player in that regard. For her, the wins in and of themselves meant nothing; they had to be for some greater good. Now, having my business compliment hers for the last 5 years, I've been watching how she carries herself with a very real dignity. I often hear old-time baseball fans rave about the dignity that Joe DiMaggio possessed when he played the game, and this is the type of presence I would compare in all the years I have known JoEllen – and I'm a true fan.

To conclude, as coaches, we all learn something from our greatest influence. I think what makes them special is that they do things just a little differently; we need to recognize those things and build on them. What I continue to learn from JoEllen is how to go about my career the right way. I also learned that this career is a choice she made and continues to make. She could very easily act entitled and treat those lower than herself with an arrogance we so often see in athletes today. She makes a personal choice to carry herself with the dignity of a champion. You see, everyone can make that choice, even though it is often the more difficult one. Because of this personal quest, JoEllen's influence lives on in the lives of those she's coached or that her business has been able to allow them opportunities for a better life, to have them cared for, and loved.

I decided to focus this piece on JoEllen Jeffrey, the person, not JoEllen, the player. I did this because the career is short, but influence on people is forever. To me, JoEllen, the person, is infinitely more impressive than JoEllen, the player. What is truly important is not being ranked in the country. It is, rather, the profound positive impact she has on those who she chooses to love. JoEllen does this better than almost all I've ever known.