



The hand we were dealt

Pandemic defining election year in Coppell

Sally Parampottil, Executive Editor-in-Chief



Lilly Gorman

2020 was defined by politics, a global pandemic and social justice movements. Though many were optimistic about the beginning of a new decade, the year turned out to be full of unexpected changes and ups and downs.







2020 was defined by politics, a global pandemic and social justice movements. Though many were optimistic about the year, it turned out to be full of unexpected changes and ups and downs. (Lilly Gorman)

It was meant to be the best of times, it was warped into the worst of times, it was the age of social activism, it was the age of polarization, it was the epoch of pandemic, it was the epoch of politics, it was the season of scientific discovery, it was the season of environmental disaster, it was the spring of change, it was the winter of resignation.

It was the year 2020.

The beginning of a new decade brought hope to many for a new period of prosperity. Instead, COVID-19 hit the United States in March and has not left. A postponed Olympics, a presidential impeachment and a wave of new awareness and activism through protests marked a year of ups and downs. As the west coast is scorched by wildfires, the east coast is battered by hurricanes, and even places like Arlington, Texas, which saw a tornado touch down in late November, are afflicted by natural disasters. Election season across the nation heightened political tensions – tensions which have yet to settle despite the election being over.

Protests and riots alike took place throughout Texas in the wake of George Floyd's death over the summer. North Texas Food Bank gave away more than 600,000 pounds of food in November, with thousands of cars lining up. Coppell High School released for spring break on March 6 and has yet to see its full population return to campus.

It was a year of analyzing and playing the cards dealt, a year of weighing options and gambling accordingly, a year of persevering and refusing to fold.



Lilly Gorman

CHS senior Maggie Castranova had her high school dreams come true during halftime on Oct. 30 at Buddy Echols Field. Donning her Lariette attire and mask, she was crowned homecoming queen by CHS Principal Laura Springer.

Exactly a week later, she tested positive for COVID-19.

"I was asymptomatic for the first week of it," Castranova said. "I got tested because I knew I was in contact with other people who got it. I went in on Nov. 6, and ended up testing positive, which was a shock to me because I felt 100% fine at the time. Symptoms hit later that week."

Castranova is only one of more than 100 CISD students and faculty who have tested positive for the coronavirus in the span of the school year. The total number of cases has risen since in-person school began and took a sharp rise over homecoming weekend, which coincided with Halloween. Castranova experienced symptoms for one week after testing positive and some lingering symptoms, such as her sense of taste, and she is now fully recovered.



Coppel High School senior Maggie Castranova is crowned homecoming queen by CHS Principal Laura Springer on Oct.30 at Buddy Echols Field. The homecoming court and crowning took place at halftime during the football game against Plano West. (Sally Parampottil)

"I had one pretty bad night where I had a really bad piercing headache," Castranova said. "I know it affects everyone's body differently, but the way it affected my body was more so through headaches and congestion. And of course, I had the loss of taste and smell, and I can't complain about that. It could have been a lot worse."

Coppel ISD offers a hybrid model of learning in which students may choose online learning, in-person learning or online learning where a student attends physical school for specific classes, such as fine arts or athletics. At the beginning of the school year, 73% of students were virtual.

"The biggest thing is engagement, teaching teachers how to engage students," Springer said. "And with hybrid, you know that group sitting in front of you, teachers are so used to performing to their students when they're sitting right in front of them. When [students] show up on Zoom, the majority of people are just staring at you, and they're on mute, so trying to get that engagement on both sides has been a huge challenge."

Springer became principal of CHS for the 2019-20 school year, ending it distant from her students. She returned to CHS, where she was an assistant principal and coach, after serving as principal of Coppel Middle School East for 12 years.

"It was a beautiful start and I just enjoyed it so much, and was so thankful to be back here on campus, loving kids and getting back around teenagers again," Springer said. "Then to leave for spring break and then never come back, that was so tough. Some people go, 'We'll be out a couple of weeks,' and try to keep extending and then not having a prom; if you were going to see us run around like chickens with their heads cut off on the right place to have a graduation for everybody and still be able to socially distance people, it was crazy."

With students not in the building, CHS's renovations were completed during the end of last school year and over the summer. Updates to the auditorium, flooring, walls and stair railings were put into place. However, most students have not had the chance to view these renovations in person, with many current sophomores having not yet had a class in the high school building at all.

CHS sophomore Amanda Zhang has not seen the full extent of CHS, though not just because she is a sophomore. Zhang moved to Coppell from Chapel Hill, N.C. at the end of October and began school in CISD on Nov. 2. Though moving itself was not as different in the pandemic compared to when she had moved nearly a decade ago from Maryland to North Carolina, acclimating to her new home has been a different process.

"It was easier to adjust because with virtual school, sometimes your teachers don't require your cameras to be on," Zhang said. "Sometimes, your classmates don't even realize there's a new person. The classwork here is a lot harder because back in North Carolina, we had left school because of the pandemic. We were trying to schedule it to where we only have four days of school, so the school work was a little harder to adjust to."

Zhang's experience in Coppell has been limited, as she is a virtual learner apart from marching band, in which she plays the clarinet. Her first high school football game was on Nov. 6, where she played alongside the only classmates she can physically meet.

"It's harder to make friends because of the pandemic," Zhang said. "You're expected to stay so far apart and wear masks. It's hard to make friends when the only way is to basically yell at each other, and because I'm a very quiet person, putting a mask on doesn't help that."

For teachers, the experience with virtual learning has been a series of adjusting teaching styles to fit the new format. Initiating classroom discussions and building the same connection with their students over a screen has not been easy. CHS social studies teacher Shawn Hudson teaches both AP comparative government and politics and AP world history – the former being a single semester class.

"I hate the fact that we are never ever going to have an in-class experience where most of us are in the room," Hudson said. "I'm always going to regret not having that interaction that would come from having the face to face. I don't know that [the second semester classes will] get that second semester either. All my classes may fall into that category this year."

With Pfizer's vaccine approved for emergency usage on Dec. 12 and Moderna's vaccine approval on Dec.18, there is a chance more students may be able to attend school in person again. Until that point, CHS simply has to take in each new change and keep in mind the constants that remain even in these times of uncertainty.

"One case in February, to a complete shutdown to no toilet paper to hospitals at max capacity. Seeing trailers outside hospitals with an eerie feeling knowing that they're just stacking bodies to the opening up of restaurants at 25%, then at 50% to America almost appearing like nothing was wrong, to right back at it – does the timeline have months and dates? Sure, but I don't know where they are," CHS AP U.S. government teacher Kimberly Lee said.



Samantha Freeman

Intertwined with the virus, yet prominent in 2020 for a larger reason, politics was the predicted defining area of the year. Though “unprecedented” had been the word used to describe COVID America, the 2020 Presidential Election was historic just the same.

Either former Democratic Vice President Joe Biden and Republican incumbent President Donald Trump (the only impeached president to ever run for reelection) would be the oldest president to take office in American history with a victory. In addition, Senator Kamala Harris (Biden’s vice presidential nominee) would be the first woman of color to hold the position. The results of the election would be historical, no matter the victor.

Biden’s 306-232 electoral win over Trump, called by the Associated Press on Nov. 7 (four days after Election Day), was uncertain. With votes in states such as Nevada, Wisconsin, Michigan and Georgia still being counted, it sparked controversy around the nation as to whether the results of the election were valid due to concerns of voter fraud and miscounts from larger amounts of mail-in ballots.

“The general population, for the most part, has accepted the result, there’s just a small group of Trump supporters that, even though they know it’s a done deal, [will not] say that yet,” Lee said. “And so they’re going to be to the very end, and then after that, some of them will say ‘oh, it was rigged,’ so you’re going to have a small portion of the population that’s never going to accept the results, which is unfortunate because that is the democratic principle that we have: we win with grace, we lose with grace.”

CHS senior Calen Halcom voted for the first time this election. Halcom believes that though the city of Coppell is conservative, the student population of CHS leans liberal. This is supported by the results of Coppell ISD’s mock election, in which the Biden/Harris ticket won with 65.2% of the vote, followed by Trump/Pence at 27.6%, then Hawkins/Walker (Green Party) and Jorgensen/Cohen (Liberatarian) at 4.3% and 2.9% respectively.

Seen even more in recent months with student-organized protests in support of the Black Lives Matter movement, there has been a new wave of social activism seen in Coppell, a trend represented across America.

“At least over the years that I’ve been in school, I’ve definitely noticed a shift towards the progressive side,” Halcom said. “I know that a lot of expression amongst the gay community, as well as LGBTQ+, has seen a recent rise over the years. And that’s a great thing, because it’s showing the rigidity of richer cities are going away.”

However, political expression does not always flow as free. America has grown more politically polarized, and especially in a school environment, there can be heightened tensions in addressing anything political.

"I watched a U.S. history teacher bring up the Chinese Exclusion Act in class in and compared it to the Muslim ban," Hudson said. "Not harshly, but just to point out that we have placed restrictions on immigrants in this country before. So this one is similar to the restrictions that are being placed by the Trump administration, you know, and afterwards, the teacher got chewed out by this kid, who was like, 'I really don't think, you know, you should be talking about Trump's immigration policy like that.'"

The negative connotation of the Chinese Exclusion Act had transferred onto the Muslim ban, prompting the student to believe it was an attack on the Trump administration.

"The kid was upset about it," Hudson said. "I was just like, 'Oh geez, man, who's sitting in my classroom that's gonna, be really upset or [whose] parent is gonna be really upset if I say anything?'"

There have been instances where political expression goes too far, even in school. Despite the fact that most students are virtual, the election period brought about a different atmosphere on campus.

"I had to really watch some of our young men, when that election went down," Springer said. "They were walking our halls with Trump flags and Trump signs and yelling at other people. I brought them in and made it very clear that you have every right to support him and I will back that 110% but you are not going to come through our buildings and degrade other people because they have a different opinion. That is America, that's what we have our freedoms for: to be able to have our own opinions and you are trying to take that right away from the people that have that right. And I said I will not allow that."

Moving forward, Coppellians will see a mix of old and new. As Biden takes the presidential office, Texas Republican John Cornyn keeps his seat in the Senate. On the Board of Trustees, Dr. Neena Biswas defeated incumbent Thom Hulme for Place 4 and incumbent David Caviness ran unopposed for Place 5. City Council keeps incumbent Wes Mays for Place 3 and after a runoff race against Jim Walker, newcomer John Jun takes Place 5. All officials, returning and newly elected, have a lot of work to do in the wake of this year's events.

"You have an economy to rebuild following a pandemic," CHS associate principal Melissa Arnold said. "You have an educational system that has basically been broken down to the bare bones that you got to ensure is built back up to where it needs to be to support all kids. The next president of the United States is going to have an uphill battle to make sure that we're OK as a country and to ensure that we come out on top of all that has happened because of 2020."



Sally Parampottil

Just prior to Thanksgiving Break, Hudson asked his students to fill out a Google Form.

It was in place of the physical papers he had asked his students from the previous year to write on, papers he gathered, balled up and burnt in what he refers to as “Ventsgiving.” The instructions for the anonymous form read:

“Identify or describe things in your life, at school, in the world, wherever that are causing frustration, making you angry, or just annoying you enough that you want to see them go up in flames.”

Hudson received the anger, sadness, exhaustion and pain of 2020 in the near 60 responses he had to his form.

As the fire engulfs each crumpled slip of paper, each source of frustration does not go away. It does not disintegrate into ashes or blow away in the wind. The defining moments and experiences of 2020 will remain influential in the state of the nation and its people, vividly seared into memories. Entering 2021 will not erase all that has happened, and the return to what is perceived as a more normal state of life may take many months to come.

Still, with each printed word swallowed by the flames, the year is left behind and people move forward. With an incoming president and projected mass distribution of vaccines, 2021 symbolizes a new round, another hand to be dealt.

One can only hope the cards are more in our favor.

Follow Sally (@SParampottil) and @CHSCampusNews on Twitter.



One small step for women, one giant leap for women in sports

TOGETHXR creating space for female representation in athletic media

Sally Parampottil, Executive Editor-in-Chief

Four percent.

According to UNESCO, that's the approximate amount of media coverage for women's sports.

Pathetic, isn't it?

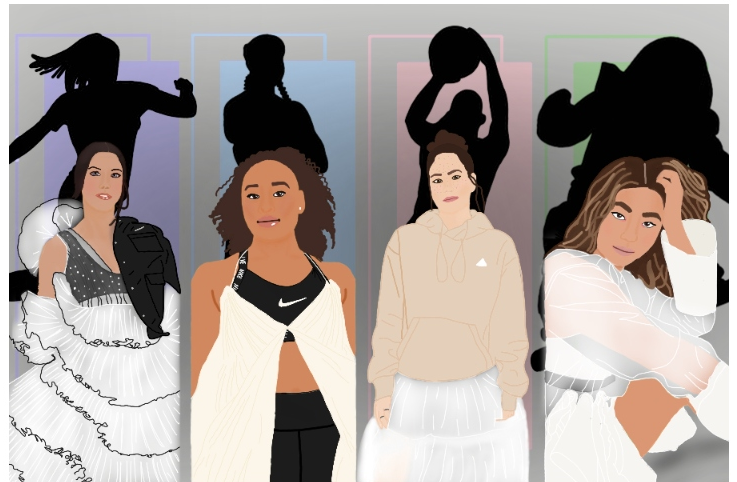
On March 2, entering Women's History Month, four U.S. Olympians launched the brand TOGETHXR to combat this drastic underrepresentation of female athletes. Swimmer Simone Manuel, snowboarder Chloe Kim, soccer player Alex Morgan and basketball player Sue Bird took the initiative to establish a space for the coverage of women's sports through the brand's website and social media accounts (@togethxr on both Instagram and Twitter).

Though seemingly small now, this is a major step in the right direction for bridging the divide between female and male treatment in the world of sports.

"Each one of them has traveled the road of being treated less, that 'because they're a woman, they're really not an athlete, they're just somebody that's taking their time up playing a sport,'" said Coppell High School Principal Laura Springer, who holds a background of coaching and playing sports. "For them to represent and especially being champions of their sports, I'm just so thankful we have young women stepping up."

Even these Olympians, elite athletes and history-makers for their gender, are aware of the inequality to the point of taking action. This initiative to create space for female representation means lesser known women are being spotlighted across a multitude of sports through TOGETHXR's professional storytelling.

Media coverage is not the only area in which women's sports are lacking. The UK-based organization Sporting Her, which also launched in early March, tackles the financial side of supporting women, such as finding sponsorships for teams, in addition to media exposure.



Ava Gillis

On March 2, Olympians Alex Morgan, Simone Manuel, Chloe Kim and Sue Bird announced the launch of their new brand: TOGETHXR. The Sidekick executive editor-in-chief Sally Parampottil writes about their goal to promote more female athletic representation and how this brand and similar organizations are huge steps of progress for women in sports.

“When I was working for [a sports commercial agency], I just wrote a tweet just asking if there were any clubs in need of sponsorship in the women’s game, and I had so many responses,” Sporting Her CEO Jessica Blissett said. “That shocked me. I didn’t expect so many women’s teams to need sponsorship, especially at the league level I was asking about; it was the National League, which is the third tier women’s football here in the UK, and I had a lot of responses. It was actually that tweet that made me want to start my own agency and focus on women in sport, to help them commercially.”

Both organizations spark a chain reaction of various groups benefiting. As more women are given media exposure, the more an audience can consume and support the content. Mainstream media, which seems to find women’s sports not-as-profitable, inferior or some combination of the two, will eventually recognize the growing support for women’s sports coverage, and become more likely to promote the stories as well. Journalism is an industry, after all. The media reports what people will buy; a growing following around women-centered sports journalism will prompt more prominent publications to provide similar coverage.

Even in scholastic journalism, where most content is not produced for profit, an imbalance of media exposure unfortunately finds a place. Though The Sidekick strives for equal coverage of boys and girls sports, this does not always happen. This year, when covering multiple events at the same time, live tweeting on @SidekickSports is given to the “more important coverage” and the other event(s) are live tweeted from the other account (@CHSCampusNews). In many, if not all, cases, this means the boys event, as seen in the coverage of soccer bi-district playoffs on March 26.

The reason behind this inequality stems from more than the publication. There’s an internal issue that’s been hindering women in sports for decades: sexist mentalities from the base levels.

Coppell High School’s female teams also see inequality through a difference in support from the student body. Last year, it was not uncommon to see a boys game take place after a girls game and the student body fill up at the end of the girls game for the boys game, rather than in support for the girls team. Though one may see more crowded stands for a volleyball match, that support vanishes the moment a football game is scheduled on the same day. From a young age, girls see actions that imply that they are less interesting than boys, less exciting than boys, less talented.

“Unless people change their mindsets, it’s not going to get to [a point of equality in sports],” Blissett said. “You do have a lot of men who see women’s [soccer], for example, [as] not equal. Not all men, but there is a big percentage that see women’s sport as not the same as men’s. The only way you’re going to get to it being equal, whether that’s gender or sexuality or races, is education. Education is the only way people are going to look at sport as an equal thing.”

Though it will take time, the rise of organizations such as TOGETHXR and Sporting Her will help lessen the negative stereotypes against female athletes. By putting women on the same media level as men, these brands are showing younger women that their contributions to the sport matter, that they don’t have to be taken less seriously just because they’re female. With time, it’s quite possible for support to build up to where there is no longer such a stark difference in crowd attendance.

“Don’t let somebody get in your head and tell you you’re less than, or that you can’t do something, or that you shouldn’t do something because you’re a woman,” Springer said. “Go for it, be all you can be, and really, don’t let people hold you back because you’re a young woman.”

With each growth spurt of representation in women’s sports coverage comes a new wave of role models for little girls to look up to – and it’s not like they don’t exist. For every Michael Phelps, there’s Katie Ledecky. For every Usain Bolt, there’s Allyson Felix. For every Cristiano Ronaldo, there’s Carli Lloyd.

And if you recognize the male names but not the female counterparts, then hopefully you’re understanding the problem.

Don’t worry, though; there’s a team of women out there working to solve it.

Follow Sally (@SParampottil) and @SidekickSports on Twitter.



Opinion: "Tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther"

Reconceptualization of success offers new hope in nation's future

Sally Parampottil, Executive Editor-in-Chief

In a sociology class the summer after my sophomore year, I learned the American Dream was dead.



Lilly Gorman

New Tech High @ Coppell senior Rocio Arguello mimics "The Great Gatsby" movie cover. The Sidekick executive editor-in-chief Sally Parampottil argues the American Dream still exists in the form of equality, freedom and justice, instead of solely financial success. Photo illustration by Lilly Gorman and Samantha Freeman

Not explicitly, not definitively, but through a series of statistics and case studies of individuals who worked hard only to find themselves in the near same financial situation as when they started, it was clear the evidence pointed towards the idea that the American Dream wasn't all it was made out to be.

In a discussion board, we were asked if we believed the American Dream is attainable and if it were true that anyone could find success if they worked hard enough.

The majority answer: yes.

The American Dream may not lie in socioeconomic mobility, but the definition of success does not always solely encompass money.

That day, more than two dozen versions of success drifted from my classmates' heads and poured into their discussion board posts, redefining the American Dream. It took the shape of the older Filipina woman who had apologized for her lack of English in her first introduction post and was able to receive her higher education through the community college, and the shape of the Hispanic man establishing a better future for his kids, even if his own life had mainly been an uphill struggle.

It took the shape of the Indian girl who sees this country as her home, even if she was told by a classmate to go back to where she came from in the first grade.

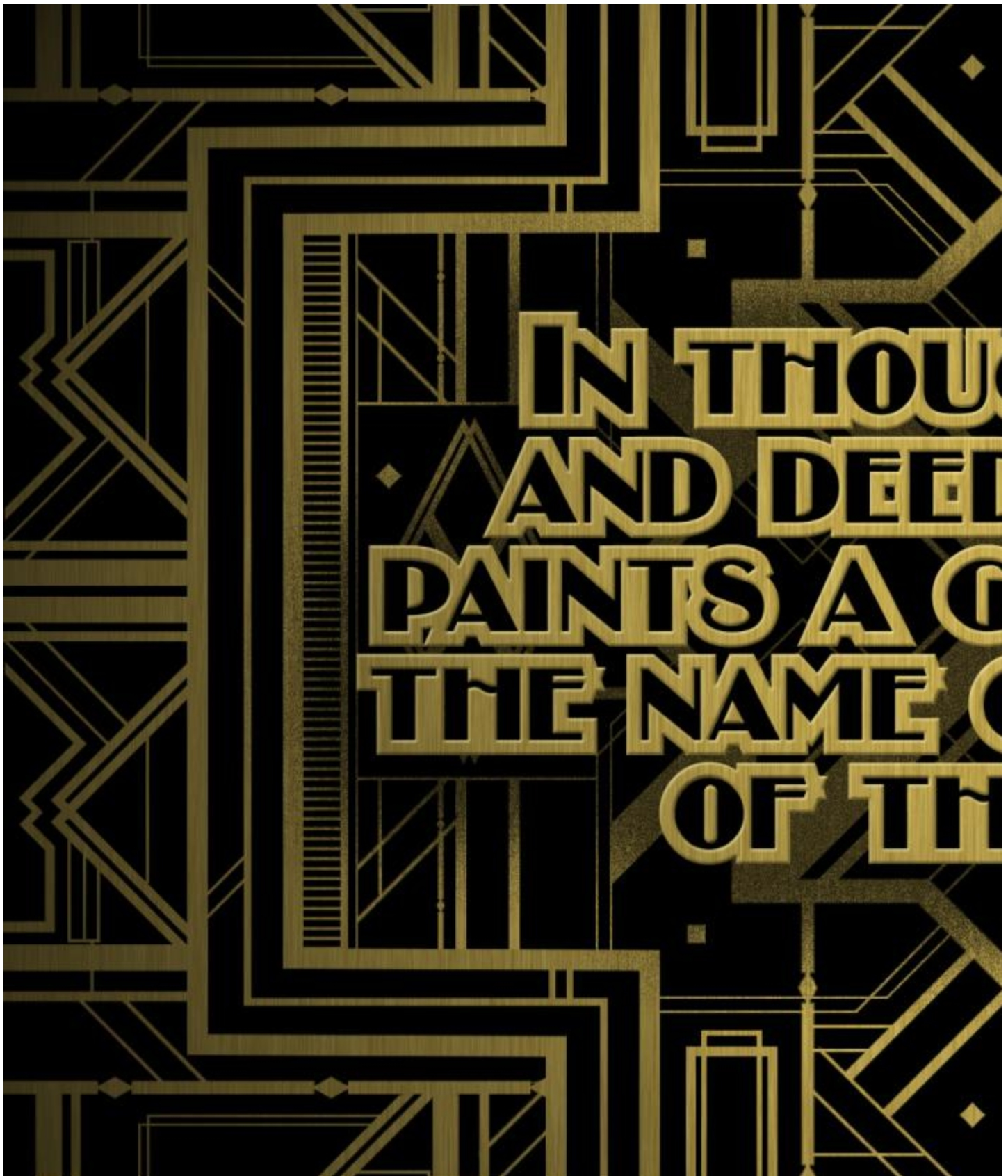
Yeah, I've had my share of racism. Sexism. Discrimination.

The American Dream we came up with in that class saw opportunity beyond finance. It saw a blaze of American spirit that transcended the harsh realities of being a minority and broke through the common superficiality that has seeped into this consumer nation. More than money or fame, there were values and morals. Family, love, friendship and purpose swirled into the wisps of our collective dream cloud.

The United States was built on values and morals too: freedom, equality, justice. With all those supposedly established within a supposedly fair democratic republic, this country is supposedly a beacon of hope, a ray of light to shine for the world to see.

You would suppose incorrectly.





Samantha Freeman

I love America. I think of where I am now and compare it to where I could have been had I been born and living in Kerala, the state in India where my parents are from, and I am eternally grateful for the opportunities I've been given.

At the same time, I know this country is nowhere near perfect.

While I may be able to step into public with a silver cross strung around my neck, I know a Muslim girl in a hijab may not feel the same security one should feel in a religiously tolerant nation. Someone's love can be scrutinized and attacked. One gender feels accelerated fear of walking alone at night due to another.



Violence mars the vivid meaning behind the stars and stripes. The red of valor turns to blood, staining the purity and innocence of white while a corrupt blue of justice turns a blind eye. In thought, word and deed, history paints a graveyard in the name of the land of the free.

America is where it is because of a continued oppression of various groups throughout the span of its 244-year existence.

The nation has just woken from a four-year nightmare. Some of the worst of us were shown and the ugliest colors revealed, and while those blemishes on our nation remain a part of who we are, they are not who we only are and not only who we will ever be. As President Joe Biden said in his inaugural address:

“Don't tell me things can't change.”

In this era of unprecedented events, something familiar is the fight for positive change. Just as white male colonists decided to no longer stand for tyranny, the mentality of standing up for what one believes in trickles to the rest of the population. A young Black girl can fight for her right to live without discrimination, a Sikh man can fight against ignorance and bigotry, a pansexual woman can fight to defend her love from anyone trying to rip it away, and an immigrant boy can fight to say this is his country as well.

I've only just become an adult. I'm still being told my dreams are too big, my heart too naive. Perhaps my youth blinds me, but my vision for the future feels anything but clouded.

A better America exists. It's attainable, and given the waves of activism spearheaded by people my age, it's well on its way. Nothing will erase the past, but our future is in our hands, and it can be as beautiful as we wish.

I dream of the day when patriotism – which has taken a negative connotation of ignorance – is once again celebrated. The opportunities presented to me in the United States may not make me money, but they will shape a better nation for my children and their children and their children after.

My American Dream can very well come true, but it won't be easy. We have to wake up each day and work. Then we sleep, wake up again and work some more. And we sleep and wake and work, this time with just a bit more love. We sleep, wake and work, this time with just a bit more energy. We sleep, wake and work, this time with just a bit more determination. We sleep, wake and work – resilient. Sleep, wake and work – unrelenting. Sleep, wake, work – persistent.

And one fine morning—we wake up and the American Dream is a dream no longer.

We wake up and know it is our reality.

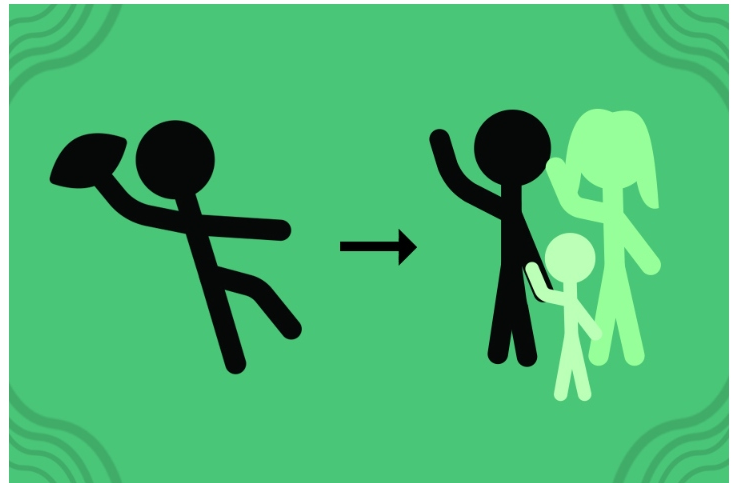
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"Better man, better husband, better father"

Analyzing role of coaches through lens of gender


Sally Parampottil, Executive Editor-in-Chief



Srihari Yechangunja

Male sports coaches can oftentimes be seen as father figures or life coaches to their athletes. The Sidekick executive editor-in-chief Sally Parampottil explores the roles and unique coaching philosophies of male sports coaches compared to female sports coaches.

Coaching philosophies serve as guidelines for how coaches



sometimes be seen as father figures or life coaches to their athletes. The Sidekick executive editor-in-chief Sally
s and unique coaching philosophies of male sports coaches compared to female sports coaches. (Srihari

lead the team, including morals and values beyond just the sport itself. Ask a male coach with a male team his coaching philosophy and a common answer might be some version of making his players a “better man, better husband, better father.”

Ask any coach with female players and it would be a rarity – if it were to happen at all – for their answer to be a version of making their players a “better woman, better wife, better mother.”

Though this difference in wording does not mean female athletes do not learn morals and values to carry into their daily life outside of sports, it does open the door to the difference in coaching mentalities when coaching male athletes compared to female athletes at the high school level.

“It’s a pivotal time in a young man’s life; they’re getting pulled in all different directions and they’ve got a lot of choices in front of them,” Coppell football coach Michael DeWitt said. “Hopefully, you can use your sport – in my case, football – as a carrot, as a motivator. Hopefully, you can, over time, lead by example because those kids are watching you and how you interact with authority.”

DeWitt incorporates the “better man, better husband, better father” mentality into his coaching philosophy.

"That's why I got into coaching, to try and help kids," DeWitt said. "Obviously, I'm a football coach, so [those kids are] young men. We all want to win on the field, but for me, it's about trying to make an impact on them and try to make them become a better person, and at the end, a better man, so at the end of the day, they can become leaders in society, better husbands and better dads."

Citing the role of coaches in life and the tendency for single-parent households to be majority single-mom, DeWitt thinks he is seen as a father-figure to some players. Football being one of the most popular sports in the United States for boys ties into the societal norm of boys playing sports, so as a football coach, his influence expands over a large number of players, this year being 76 athletes on the varsity team.

"I hope I can be a positive male influence to them, and if they don't have a dad, then certainly, I want to stand in the gap and be someone they can look to as a father figure and help give direction and someone they know loves and cares about them," DeWitt said. "I'm going to coach them hard, and I'm going to hold them accountable for things and discipline them the way I would my own son."

The father-figure feeling persists through both sides, however, not solely resting in male athletes viewing their coaches. According to Coppell pole vault coach Don Kemp, he sees himself as a father figure for both his male and female athletes, following their accomplishments beyond just their time on the team.

"I was talking to some stranger, and one thing I was telling him was how 'my kid did this, I have a kid in the Navy,' and he goes, 'You've got a lot of kids,' and I go, 'Well, I'm a teacher, they aren't my kids, but they're my kids,'" Kemp said. "I feel like I have ownership in their upbringing, whether it's a guy or a girl, and I'm proud when I see that this person is a doctor or this person is a CEO."

The sense of being a parental figure is also seen in female coaches on the motherly side, which is embraced as well.

"[Male coaches] seem to get a little more respect than female coaches, but I absolutely feel like a mother," Coppell girls basketball assistant Julieann Hartsburg said. "You're their mother, their nurse, their counselor, their friend. You're their confidant whenever they just need to talk to you."

In terms of coaching philosophy, the qualities meant to be transferred to athletes are the same for both girls and boys. However, this is not described often as being a better mother and wife, as that definition is still fluid in today's society, not strictly being a stay-at-home mom or being a member of the workforce.

"For a guy, [being a good parent is] more about being able to provide for their family," Hartsburg said. "For women, because we have less single-mother households in this area, it's just going against that stereotypical 'women are just to be stay-at-home moms or nurses.' Nowadays, it's about being able to fight and compete for all the other jobs guys do, so it's not just being a mother or a wife figure, it's maybe being as up there as other men or not being looked at as stereotypical women."

This brings another difference in coaching philosophies beyond just the way it is verbalized: the incorporation of sexism. With a history of being excluded and discriminated against, women in sports are still actively combating inequality, which a lesson in persistence is often needed to be conveyed from coach to player. In addition, the current state of inequality – such as the difference in pay between the NBA and WNBA – mean sports hold another definition to women in terms of long-term goals.

"Girls do want to get college scholarships, they spend so much time and effort in their sport," Coppell High School Principal Laura Springer said. "Now, every boy thinks they're going to be in the NBA or the NFL, and I don't think we women think that about ourselves. We think we're going to go to college and then not many women think about pro basketball."

The lack of a highly profitable future results in a different mentality when it comes to what sports mean to female athletes. A career in athletics is not as prevalent a dream compared to their male counterparts, which is something coaches are aware of. This could also slightly alter coaching philosophy, as the end goal is less sports-centered for more girls.

“Guys can do sports and I feel like that’s their end all be all. ‘I want to be in the NBA.’ For women, obviously it’s different,” Hartsburg said. “We love to play, but we don’t get paid as much in the WNBA, so where it differs is that it’s not just basketball for them; it’s family, it’s friends, it’s school. More often than not, there’s not as many girls who go to the WNBA, so they have to figure out what they’re doing after high school, what they’re doing after college. Some of them do make it to college, but after that, they have to prepare for other things, like ‘what is my secondary option for my career?’ Guys are more likely to go a little bit further as far as females in professional sports.”

In addition to perception of the sport as a part of their life, coaching a female team comes with a different method of teaching the technical skills required for the sport, which according to Hartsburg can be successfully done by male coaches, not solely female ones.

“The coaching is the same; girls just think differently,” Hartsburg said. “In the way you talk to them, you can’t necessarily talk to a girl the same way you can with a guy. With girls, you can’t just be ‘A to F,’ you have to be ‘A to B to C to D to E’ before you get to F. We’re very sequential. It’s the way you say it, not necessarily the philosophy. You learn the same things, but the way you get there is a little bit different. It requires a lot more patience and understanding of women in general.”

Despite the differences in technical coaching approach and verbiage used for coaching philosophy, the main post-athletic messages remain constant: improvement beyond just being a better athlete.

“At the end of the day, I want the kids that I coach to be better people, male or female,” DeWitt said. “If you can teach them to be a person of character, then at the end of the day, they can be a better mom, dad, husband, wife, coworker. For me, that’s the philosophy; it’s not just ‘better man’ or ‘better woman,’ it’s ‘I want to help these kids become the best version of themselves,’ and if you do that, they will be better citizens, better fathers, better moms.”

Follow Sally (@SParampottil) and @SidekickSports on Twitter.



The bottom line

Linemen serving as essential yet unappreciated components of football

Sally Parampottil, Executive Editor-in-Chief

The modern perception of football would not exist without linemen.

The thuds of bodies slamming into one another, the grunts and huffs of players as they grapple, the iconic row of squat poses as the ball snaps and the play begins – the imagery most people associate with football is all dependent on the existence of linemen.

However, despite their importance to the game, linemen often go underappreciated and underrepresented in the media.

“They add so much more than people think,” Coppell junior defensive lineman Sammy Hernandez said. “They add joy to the team, they add a presence to the team that people who don’t play football don’t understand. Everyone outside football thinks linemen are the least important in how ‘they’re just big guys, they’re not skilled guys,’ but we’re honestly one of the biggest impacts of the game.”

Even the average person could probably give a general idea of what the quarterback does and take an accurate guess at what a running back or receiver does just by the name alone. In contrast, most non-football fans probably would not be able to define the role of a lineman other than they stand in a line. To many, the large, not-too-smart athlete is the stereotype given to linemen.

“Yes, we are strong, yes, we are big, but we are more than that,” Hernandez said. “We are part of the team, even if people don’t realize because we don’t score points. We just don’t get enough credit for what we do in the game and how our positions show us to the public.”

Defensive linemen are tasked with trying to take down the quarterback. When one breaks through the offensive line and knocks him down behind the line of scrimmage before he throws the ball, it is called a sack, which is a major statistic for the defense.

Though this objective measurement exists for defensive linemen, it is often unnoticed by the media, specifically local media.



Blanche Harris

Coppell senior center Febechi Nwaiwu, senior offensive linemen Austin Darcy and sophomore offensive lineman Trevor Timmerman prepare for a play against Highland Park at Highlander Stadium on Oct. 9. The Sidekick executive editor-in-chief Sally Parampottil believes linemen are essential to football but often go underappreciated.

The Dallas Morning News' high school sports section has a page for individual rankings with football statistics. On that page is a list of the leading players for rushing, passing and receiving yards in the North Texas area. While there are team stats for leading offenses and defenses, there are no individual defensive stats.

"It's not fair for us," Hernandez said. "I understand [the quarterback, running backs and receivers] get most of the glory all the time, but we are really huge factors – the defensive line – in how if we sack that quarterback for negative yards, that can turn into a third and long or a second and long or even make them punt. They should add sacks because it's just like scoring a touchdown. If our receiver gets three to four touchdowns a game and I get three or four sacks a game, you don't hear that as a big factor or in recognition of some way."

The offensive line has a similar problem in lack of media recognition, but it stems also from a lack of statistics to use.

"It's hard to gage statistics for offensive linemen because each coach has a different definition of what a pancake is or what a domination block is," Coppell offensive line coach Allen Oh said. "With rushing yards, you can easily measure that. We don't really have anything we can measure, and the things we can measure can obviously be skewed based off of what kind of offense we're running."

When looking at Coppell Student Media's coverage of the 2019 football season, one can count how many times overall linemen were recognized in previews or post-game stories. In total, offensive and defensive linemen were mentioned by name or spoken to only nine times for the entire season. Of those nine times, five were offensive linemen (four from quotes or mentioned in a quote and one was about the other team's offensive lineman scoring a touchdown) and the remainder were defensive linemen (two quotes, a forced fumble and an injury).

Compare that to the 32 times a quarterback, 17 times a receiver and 12 times a running back were mentioned or interviewed.

"When you talk about the news, the only time when linemen get reported or some publicity is when they sign a big contract, because we don't have the stats," Oh said. "Every game, they're going to talk about how many yards the quarterback threw for, how many yards the running back rushed for, how many tackles a linebacker had, but they're never going to talk about how many pancakes the O-line got."

Coppell football has two graduates currently playing in the NFL – both of them linemen. Class of 2014 graduate Solomon Thomas plays for the San Francisco 49ers as a defensive lineman (who played in the 2020 Super Bowl) and class of 2015

graduate Connor Williams plays for the Dallas Cowboys as an offensive linemen. In terms of representation on the national level, Coppell linemen have more than any other position.

"They're huge impacts in their team," Hernandez said. "Even if they're not a skill guy, they're still linemen and still hold a huge weight of the team."



Coppell senior defensive lineman Fernando Pando, junior defensive lineman Simi Ncube-Socks and senior linebacker Marcelo Estrada charge Highland Park on Oct. 9 at Highlander Stadium. The Sidekick executive editor-in-chief Sally Parampottil believes linemen are essential to football but often go underappreciated. (Blanche Harris)

While it is possible to play football without linemen, it is practically a different game.

“[Linemen] add more of a timer on the quarterback and the running back,” Coppell senior offensive linemen Austin Darcy said. “In 7-on-7, you don’t have any linemen, it’s just skill position on skill position. In 11 on 11, you have offensive linemen and defensive linemen, and you’re going to have that timer on the quarterback... It adds that timer that really forces that ball in the quarterback’s hand to make a last second decision.”

If not through media and statistics, linemen deserve positive recognition from the public. Without their contributions to the game in terms of raising the stakes and adding that famous football physicality, the game just would not be the same.

“The general perception is that we’re just big guys who just hit people. There’s more to the person, to the offensive line, than just that,” Oh said. “If someone were to sit in one of my meeting rooms during an offensive line meeting and go through all the different looks and blocking schemes and they were to see how our kids answer those questions, they would be so shocked and impressed by how fast they have to think and act and do the job.”

Follow Sally (@SPampottil) and @SidekickSports on Twitter.



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I am writing to recommend Coppell High School Class of 2021 senior Sally Parampottil be named 2021 National Scholastic Press Association Writer of the Year.

For 2020-2021, Sally served the editor-in-chief of our school newspaper, *The Sidekick*. I have served as adviser of this program for 16 years and Sally is truly one of the best overall journalists and individuals to come through my classroom.

Prior to the start of the 2019-2020 school year, I established a goal for our program to be the best high school sports section in the nation. This is a lofty goal, but one which I felt was attainable. In recent years, I felt we had slipped in our sports coverage and content as a result from less students being interested in sports journalism.

I needed a student to lead this effort and I immediately thought of Sally, as I selected her as the executive sports editor for *The Sidekick* and CoppellStudentMedia.com. Needless to say, Sally did not disappoint in the role.

We are a large Class 6A (highest classification in Texas) suburban school with a massive athletics department, in addition to club sports. Sally created spreadsheets and schedules to ensure all events were covered with reporters and photographers. She developed relationships with each coach and the key players on the varsity teams.

Sally established a series, The Sportlight, which profiles a different junior varsity boys and girls athlete each week. Her section had gamers, advances, features, Q&A's, videos, and podcasts. Is there truly a way to determine if the best sports section in the nation goal was met? Not really. But I can say that the sports section this past year exceeded even my lofty expectations. This would not have happened without Sally.

Her portfolio for the past two years does make her, in my opinion, the best student writer in the country. "*Stick to sports*" has become a social media response to athletes or sports journalists who engage and express their thoughts on politics and social issues.

Thankfully, Sally doesn't "stick to sports." While she spent much of the year on Friday nights covering football and Saturday mornings covering swimming, Sally also spent days talking to students who are essential workers during COVID-19. She spent hours sorting through data to breakdown the rosters of each Coppell team based on race.

Sally wrote columns about what it is like to be a female sports journalist and the challenges this presents. During fall, winter and spring breaks, Sally kept working as the news never stops. When schools closed in March 2020 and we went to distance learning from home, Sally never missed a beat and neither did her sports section – despite the fact there would not be a single high school sporting event the remainder of the school year. She found a fun way to produce content – getting the staff to participate in the 2020 *The Sidekick* Olympics through home submitted videos and Zoom, with events ranging from page design to speed typing to chess.

I believe all of this makes her the best overall journalist and student in our program.

Thank you for your time and consideration of Sally.

Chase Wofford

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