

Chapel Words (May 6, 2010) “All About Rugby” — Tim Coy

Last week, Mr. Samuel treated us all to a speech in Chapel on a subject about which he knew a surprising amount: rowing. Mr. Samuel’s oldest son Daf was a rugby player and a good one, but in his Grade 10 year, he rowed. During that year, Mr. Samuel was a great supporter of rowing and came to all of Daf’s races, including one in St. Catharines. That was 4 years ago, but his passion for the sport has obviously continued. His speech last week inspired me to speak about one of my new passions and something that I know a lot about and that is rugby.

I figured if Mr. Samuel can speak about rowing, why can’t I speak about rugby? At first, I wanted to copy the format he used for his speech. Since he started with “Row, row, row your boat” I thought I would start with a rugby song. I was a little naïve in this regard. I googled rugby songs and there were indeed many sites dedicated specifically to rugby songs. The first one I clicked, however, had a banner at the top of the page. It read, “Warning—Many of the song lyrics on this page are offensive and not suitable for younger readers.” I thought, “How civilized. It’s nice that they would be sensitive enough to include such a heads up.” As I continued reading, however, I was surprised to see, “If you don’t like it, too bad. After all, this is a site for rugby songs. If you didn’t expect bad language, what planet are you from?” So I’m sorry to say there will be no “merrily down the stream” today.

When I came to Shawnigan, I did not know much about rugby or its rules. I have since seen many games and now know fractionally more about rugby and its rules. I wanted to share with you though, a few tips for those spectators out there who don’t understand what’s happening, but want to seem like they do. There are 2 things you need to know to sound like an expert. First of all, if a player doesn’t catch the ball cleanly, say in a disappointed tone, “Oh, knock on.” Secondly, it is very important to be aware of who you are standing with. Here’s how to choose the right person with whom to watch the game. If a player is tackled, he will leave the ball on the ground, and a crowd will form around him. When this happens, point and say in an exasperated tone, “ruck over!” Then turn to the person beside you and ask, “why don’t they ruck over?” This part is crucial, because you will learn pivotal information about this person. If they know rugby well, they will quickly realize that you are a fraud. If you ask “why don’t they ruck over?” and they begin to answer your question—move on. Eventually you will run across someone who answers with, “I’m sorry, I don’t know much about rugby.” When you find this person, don’t move. Stay there for the rest of the game and repeat your catch phrases at appropriate times. Now, at Shawnigan, finding a person that doesn’t know the game can prove very difficult. If you find yourself surrounded by experts, try a phrase which I do not understand but which sounds cool, and that is “oh, that was a sublime dummy.”

At the beginning of this year in Lonsdale's House, we ordered Setanta Sports and began to watch rugby games after Prep. Since (as you know) I only know 2 or 3 rugby terms, I was quickly exposed as someone who did not understand the game. Mike B., for one, will no longer watch rugby with me, partly because of my limited knowledge, but also because I repeatedly badmouthed the Irish kicker, who consistently misses easy kicks by the way. Andy L., however, is very patient and he explained some of the strategies and rules of the game to me. This is where my appreciation of the sport really developed. Rugby really is tactical and a thinking man's game. A quote I found on a different rugby site said, "the most important area on the field is the 6 inches between your ears." After reading this I did think "shouldn't that be 8 inches? I mean, some of those guys have pretty big heads." It is a physical, rough, demanding sport but it takes strategy, quick thinking and grace as well. A famous baseball quote by Yogi Berra could also apply to rugby. He said, "Baseball is 90% mental. The other half is physical."

Almost any sporting endeavour can become a metaphor for life, and rugby is no exception. Two terms come to mind though when I think of rugby. One is sacrifice (which we've heard a lot about recently) and one is trust. When looking at a team's defense, you try to find or create a weakness. When running with the ball, it is actually a good thing to see 2 or 3 guys coming to tackle you. What that means is that 1 or 2 of your teammates will then be open or uncovered. That is called sacrifice. You pay the price, but the team benefits. Imagine running into 3 large people about to punish you and thinking "Perfect! Someone on my team will be open!" That is however, the way a rugby player thinks, but it only works if you can trust that your teammates will be in the right place to turn the advantage into points. If you were continually tackled by 3 people, and then passed it to teammates who weren't there, you would eventually stop sacrificing your body, because it did not result in anything positive. I see this kind of thing happen in our school life everyday on different levels. Mr. Dukelow sacrifices his free time in order to run those fantastic community gatherings at our school, because he trusts that the students will come through with the volunteering. Mr. Perry sacrifices many of his Sundays and nights because he trusts the Musical students will perform when it matters. Students who tutor other students make a sacrifice so that the community as a whole benefits. These all are akin to running into three tacklers. It's all for the greater good.

Finally, I want to talk about a different kind of rugby: wheelchair rugby. Wheelchair rugby was invented in Canada in 1977. It is played by 24 countries and is an official sport of the Paralympics. There is a documentary film called *Murderball* which chronicles the intense rivalry between USA and Canada. The wheelchairs are equipped with extra padding and it is a contact sport. To me, this exemplifies the idea that anything is possible. Imagine being unable to walk but still finding a way to compete in a sport like rugby. At Shawnigan, you are asked to contribute to Academics, Fine Art and Sport, and you are asked to strive for excellence in all three areas. The thing that resonates with me here is that it doesn't matter your

level of skill in a particular endeavor. Does the Second XV feel any less excited when they win a game just because they are not the top team? I don't think so. Should a student create a beautiful piece of art and think, "Someone could have done that better." I hope not. Wheelchair rugby is an example of people giving their all to compete and excel despite certain limitations. I urge all of you to get really involved in whatever it is you do here at the school, and do it fully, to the best of your ability, despite whatever perceived or real limitations you have. Opportunities are everywhere at this school, but it is your job to make them happen.

So now Mr. Samuel has spoken about rowing and I have talked about rugby. What's next, Mr. Kingstone speaking about Physics? Mrs. Stroebel talking about Ice Hockey? Mr. Murdy regaling us all with knitting stories? Mr. Cox debating the merits of X-Box versus Playstation? You get the idea. Remember though, it's ok to step out of your comfort area while here. Challenge yourselves and be the best you can be at whatever you choose. But choose something, or choose lots of things, but whatever you choose, take it on with the full Shawnigan spirit and be your absolute best. Thank you.