



AIA Feature Story

MARCOS DE NIZA RECOGNIZES NATIONAL BREAST CANCER MONTH

PHOENIX, AZ (Oct. 12, 2009) – They say behind every good man is a good women.

Well, after an emotionally charged, inspiring night in Tempe on Friday night, you would have to say that there were four good women behind Marcos de Niza Athletic Director Mike Griffith.

Griffith and his Padres football team made Arizona history by becoming the first gridiron squad in the state to wear pink jerseys in a game in recognition of National Breast Cancer Month. The over-capacity crowd was buzzing, the nearly 50 credentialed cameramen were flashing away, and Cardinals stars and cheerleaders were enjoying the game from the sidelines. And to think, without Griffith's stable of strong women around him, this night may have never ever happened.

Nearly six months ago, Griffith's 17-year old daughter Lindsay made an innocent request to her dad that the football team should follow in the footsteps of the Arizona State women's basketball team and don all-pink jerseys. Griffith initially scoffed at the idea, thinking there was no way that men would ever wear pink and, on a more fiscal level, no way the team could afford new jerseys. However, his wife and two other daughters Katie, 19, and Reagan, 12, kept the pressure on dad.

Lindsay, who isn't even a student at Marcos and actually attends Basha High School, didn't quit either. After making a few quick inquiries, donors started to pop up and the whole idea appeared to become more of a possibility. Then, the most popular team in Phoenix, a team that inspired and unified the entire city last year, stepped up to inspire the valley in a different way and made the dream a reality.

The NFC Champion Arizona Cardinals, whose historic run to the Super Bowl brought a sense of togetherness to Phoenix that the city had never felt before, purchased and donated pink jerseys for every player on the team. As valuable as their financial contributions were, the Cardinals also donated the time of cheerleaders, former ASU kicking star Luis Zendejas, mascot Big Red, and superstar quarterback Matt Leinart to show the team's support for the Padres and the cause.

You could feel the energy in the air from the moment you stepped onto the Marcos campus. Large pink banners lined the front railings. The field was painted with pink lines, pink letters, and a pink ribbon. The Padres' cheerleaders and band members all wore custom made pink shirts and waved pink towels. The ASU cheer competition team showed up with its own pink shirts. Even the referees had pink whistles and pink sand bags. The stands were more than full as some fans were forced to stand. Most of the onlookers donned pink shirts and held pink balloons.

The players wore pink bracelets and arms bands to match their shirts as well. Some wore commemorative gear thanks to the efforts of Captain Ramon Abreu, who personally found a donor to give the team over 20 pair of pink gloves.

"I have so many people that I have lost," said an emotional Abreu, who scored three touchdowns and made a miraculous interception in the game, "There are a lot of people out here who have friend and family who have this horrible disease. It is great to give great to give back to the community."

The players then lined up along the sideline next to nearly 30 cancer survivors who each wore one of the Padres' normal brown jerseys. Everyone was holding hands. The Marcos boys, mothers, fathers, grandmothers, sons, and daughters of all different races and creeds stood together hand in hand, all unified for one cause; for one goal; for one dream.

Once the whistle blew, the fans released over 800 pink balloons and the sky lit up the field with a pink glow. The Padres then transferred the emotion of the night onto the field and into the game immediately as they forced and recovered a fumble on Perry's first offensive play. The team didn't slow down from there, dominating the Pumas and taking a 28-0 halftime lead.

That's when the real fireworks began.

Marcos' Culinary Arts teacher, Lisa Berkley, had been diagnosed with breast cancer on October 22 of 2008. Despite massive chemotherapy and radiation treatments, Berkley never took time off. However, while a good woman is always behind a strong man... a strong man is often behind a strong woman.

Berkley attests that as tough as she has been through this ordeal, she couldn't have survived without the help of her husband Mike. She acknowledged how difficult her sickness was for him, but marveled at his dedication as he continued to push her and be there for her no matter what she was going through. Thankfully, Lisa's latest prognosis is looking good.

At halftime, Leinart, the Cardinals cheerleaders, and Big Red presented a teary-eyed Berkley with a field pass and tickets to Sunday's game against Houston, a signed game-worn Leinart jersey, and a personalized autographed picture of Cardinals' Larry Fitzgerald. It has been well documented that Fitzgerald's mother passed away from breast cancer in 2003.

"Obviously Larry is a very good friend of mine," said Leinart during the game, "I think it's awesome that the NFL has raised so much awareness and now this high school is doing it... It shows that there are a lot of people supporting this cause and hopefully one day we could have a cure."

The Padres returned the favor to the Cardinals, presenting them with a stunning framed pink jersey and plaque.

When asked if he would ever wear a pink jersey himself during a game, Leinart responded by saying, "To be honest with you, to raise awareness, I don't think anybody on my team or in the NFL would think twice about it... I would be proud to wear one."

When all was said and done, the Padres expect to have raised over \$7,000 and proved once again that when the people of our great nation are faced with a real crisis, we can put aside all of our differences and our pretty issues to come to the aide of those who really need help. Whether its women pushing and motivating their men for a good cause, or the men supporting their women when they need strength, we are clearly at our best when we bond together.