

A TRUE WIN: Diary of Vermont's Gay Games Volleyball Team

Bob Bolyard

BURLINGTON -- As for our record of play, we won eight games and lost fourteen.

On our second day, we started out losing two games to a team from Hawaii, but their margin of victory was slim. We then played a team from Cologne, Germany, and won both games of that match. We were next to play a team from the Netherlands, but since they did not show up at the appropriate time, they forfeited, and two more games were added to our win column. Our last scheduled match was with a very good team from Los Angeles, and we lost both games.

As we were leaving the court, the officials told us that the team from the Netherlands had just arrived. There had been a mix-up in playing times and directions to the gym, and they asked us if we would sacrifice our forfeited wins and play the Dutch team. Our five wins had us feeling pretty good about ourselves, and to chance having two of them taken away was something to think about. Two of the other teams they were supposed to play had already left the gym, so if we did not play them, they would only get to play one match for the day. Not much net time for traveling so far. So, being the fair-minded Vermonters we are, we agreed. We played two close games - and we won both of them. Not only did we feel good for earning the two wins, but the Dutch team was so appreciative for us playing them that they gave each of us pins promoting the 1998 Gay Games to be held in Amsterdam as well as a banner from Holland. We had made friends.

On the third night, there was a volleyball party at the huge dance bar, Club USA. This was where we were to find out how we placed in the qualifying tournament and who we would play next. When the announcement was made, we discovered we were seeded number five, meaning we were just five matches away from medal contention. We were ecstatic. Then the director of the volleyball competition said he had some special thank-yous to make. The first two were to volunteers. The third was to the team from Burlington, who he said showed the true meaning of the Games by giving up two wins to allow the team from the Netherlands to play. Out of 165 teams and over 1,300 players, the team from Vermont was singled out.

Our first match in the qualifying round was with a team from New Mexico. We knew right away they did not take the game too seriously and were there to enjoy themselves, win or lose. We beat them both games. A member of their team gave each of us a handmade string bracelet with a pewter salamander on it, and they cheered us on the rest of the day. Our second match was with a team from Buffalo that took the game very seriously. We squeaked out a victory the first game, but the second one went back and forth with them coming out on top. We then lost the third game and were moved down to the losers bracket. One more loss and we would be out of the competition. However, if we won the next two games, we would get at least the Bronze. The Delft Blue Boys of Holland were our next opponents. They had a slight height advantage and looked quicker, but we felt we had strength on our side. It was a great game until it ended, and they won.

Although we came home without winning a gold, silver or bronze medal, we have no shame in the way we represented ourselves and Vermont. In years to come, it would not be the wins and losses remembered, but rather memories of being among gay men and lesbians from all over the world and being a part of the largest athletic and cultural event of any kind in history. ▼

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