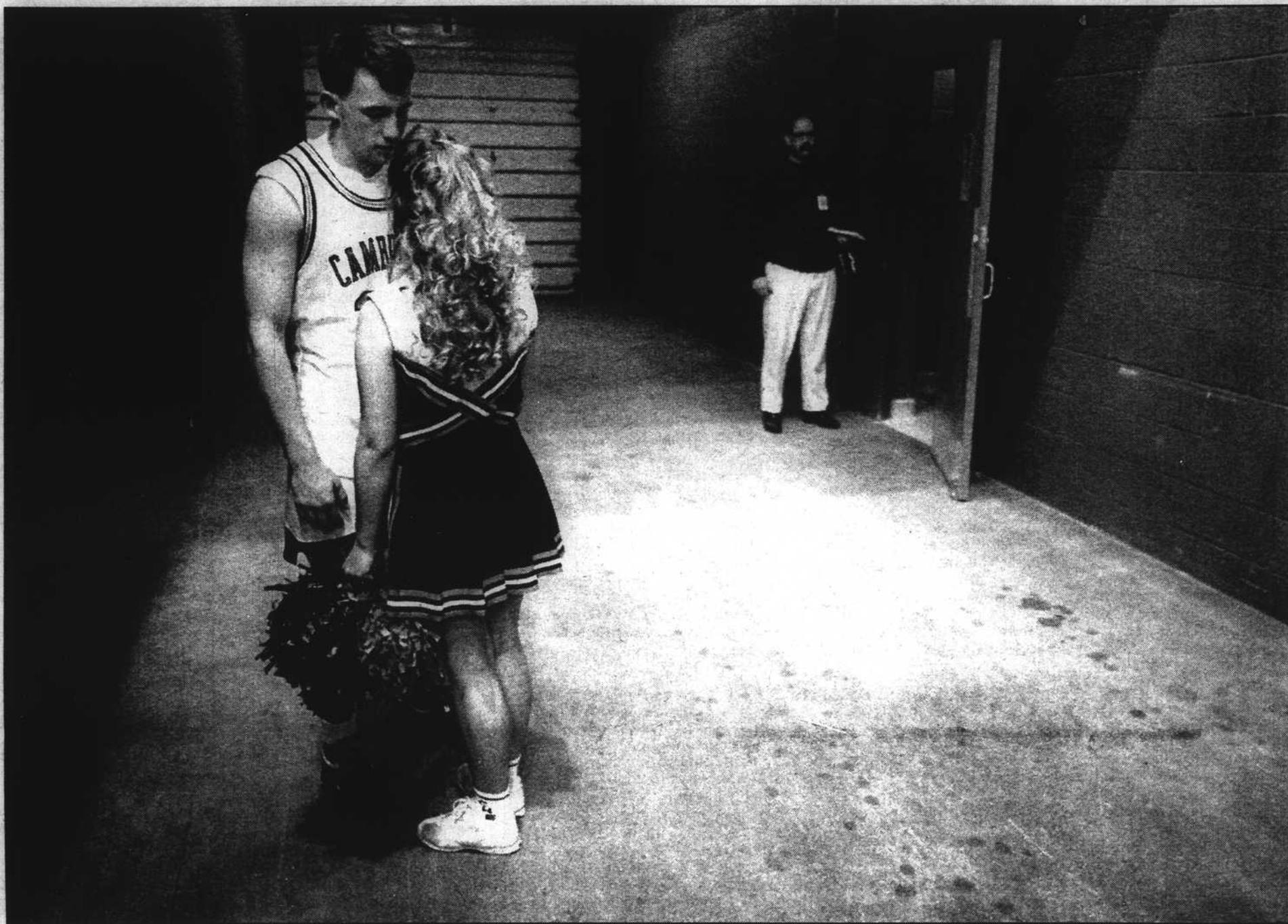


INSIGHT

Monday, March 13, 1995

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After Cambridge's second-round loss to Lincoln Christian at Pershing Auditorium on Friday, cheerleader Carrie Jones consoles her boyfriend, Brian Holtze, in a hallway outside the locker room.

Cambridge

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nament. Cheerleaders, band members, students, teachers, parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and other loyal fans composed the entourage that traveled down Interstate 80 on Wednesday and Thursday.

"Everyone expects you to win," says Tim Ommert, a senior on the team. "If you get beat, you don't meet everyone's expectations."

They know what it's like to win.

The boys' basketball team finished the regular season undefeated, annihilating 23 teams before it was through.

Elm Creek was first to fall. Then another and another and another and another.

Next on the list, Elwood. That team was no match for the Trojans, who scored 111 points and held their opponent to only 66.

The streak continued as Cambridge devoured yet another team and another and another.

The Trojans faced their biggest challenge up to that point at a tournament in Kansas, where they played bigger teams from bigger schools.

Even those teams couldn't stop them. Cambridge conquered Hoxie, Kan., St. Francis, Kan., and finally Oberlin, Kan., its toughest opponent yet.

Coach Del Schoenfish said the Kansas victories boosted the boys' confidence to a new level.

"The kids finally realized, 'Hey, we're not too bad. We can play with anybody, and we can beat anybody.'"

After that, the Trojans were invincible.

They slaughtered eight more teams before meeting their biggest rival in subdistricts: Republican Valley.

Cambridge sneaked past its rival by only seven points, but that was enough.

"We don't like losing to them at all," says Carrie Jones, 17, one of Cambridge's seven cheerleaders. "They get pumped for us and we get pumped for them."

After the victory against Republican Valley, only one team blocked the Trojans' road to the state tournament: Grant.

Cambridge stole the trip to the tournament by two points in overtime.

Tim says the fans helped the Trojans edge past Grant.

"We were tired in overtime," he says. "Something from the fans kept us going. Every time we were on defense, they started chanting. They were in the game with us, cheering as loud as they can."

The Cambridge boys' basketball team follows a legacy of winning in a town where sports are king and competition is a way of life.

In the last 1 1/2 years, Cambridge has won six state championship titles.

The girls' basketball team won its third straight championship title last weekend, setting a state record with 73 consecutive victories.

Earlier this year, the undefeated football team brought home the Class C-2 championship trophy.

In addition to the girls' basketball title, the Trojans claimed titles last year in track and volleyball. They were runners-up for the state golf title.

"We don't like to lose," Carrie says. "It's okay if you have to. You got to lose sometimes."

But in Cambridge, that doesn't happen often.

"Everyone in our school has pressure to be competitive, to win," Carrie says.

About 90 percent of the students at Cambridge High School participate in sports.

Though Cambridge students excel in other areas, including academics, chorus and band, they are most known for sports.

In Cambridge, sports are a big deal. So big that the teachers won't schedule homework for athletes on the day of a game.

So big that school administrators call off classes when one of their teams plays in the tournament.

So big that loyal fans save money all winter to make the trip to the tournament.

"If our boys don't win state basketball, I don't know how we'll handle that," Carrie says. "I mean, they haven't lost a game all year."

But the tournament is more than just basketball. It's coming to Lincoln to have fun, to be away from home, to find adventure.

After the opening game, the Cambridge cheerleaders are ready for a night on the town. After checking into their room at the Hampton Inn and freshening up, the five cheerleaders pile into their red Suburban and head to Rock 'N Roll Runza for dinner. From there, they're off to Gateway Mall.

Though they have traded in their orange, black and white cheerleading uniforms for jeans and sweatshirts, the signs on the windows of the Suburban and the 38-county license plates give them away.

The words "Honk for the Trojans" and "Trojan cheerleaders" are taped on the back windshield in orange letters. Signs reading "Take state Cambridge Trojans #1" decorate the side windows along with orange paper cut-outs of the cheerleaders' names.

Tonight, Tonya Ralston, Bobbie Pace, Jenny Miller, Carrie Jones and Lynette Phillips aren't thinking about basketball. On the way to the mall, they giggle and gossip. John Mellencamp's song "Wild Nights" comes on the radio and the girls pause in mid-conversation to sing a line.

"Does anybody have orange and black nail polish?" one asks.

"I do," another responds, "at home."

"Why didn't you bring it?"

At the mall, the cheerleaders separate from their adult sponsor, Karen Gottsch, and immediately go into Claire's to examine the merchandise.

"Hey Phil, get this," says one of the cheerleaders to Lynette as she holds up a pink scrunchie used to pull long hair back into a pony tail.

"Oh yeah," responds Lynette, 17,

who has short brown hair.

Tonya, 17, a slim blonde with shoulder-length hair and hazel eyes, puts on a pair of sunglasses.

"Are they me?" she asks, taking a chewed-up straw out of her mouth to talk. "Should I get them or not?"

She studies herself in a mirror, then makes her decision. "Yeah."

The girls move quickly from store to store.

"Geez Louise, I'm getting very warm," Lynette says as she takes off her black and orange jacket that proclaims Cambridge as the 1994 C-1 state girls' basketball champs.

"Are we gonna go roller skating tonight," Lynette asks as the group walks through Lerner.

"No," her friends respond. Knowing how much Lynette wants to go roller skating, someone in the group tries to reassure her "There's tomorrow night."

"But what if we go home tomorrow?" Lynette asks.

"Why would we go home tomorrow?" another responds defensively.

"If we the L word," Lynette says quietly.

"Yeah, the four-letter L word," another echoes.

Back at the Hampton Inn about 9:30 p.m., basketball team members lounge in the lobby.

After their victory, the team watched another Class C-2 game, which would determine the Trojan's opponent in the semifinals. It would be Lincoln Christian.