

All hail the jam

Only one real message hidden inside School is Cool Jam



Deep inside the School is Cool Jam was one real message; followed by Li'l Red and a Rope Warrior

April 10, 2000. It's 10:00 a.m. Time to Jam.

The Ninth Annual School is Cool Jam, a gathering for thousands of middle school children at the Bob Devaney Sports Center, is billed as the "nation's largest pep rally for education." Among the highly educational presentations were a jump roper, reminders of corporate sponsorship and the advertisement of next year's School is Cool Jam, which was running on the HuskerVision screens before the ninth Jam had even begun.

It was coordinated by the Lincoln Public Schools Department of Special Education, Golden Key National Honor Society and UNL Athletic/Academic Center. A pinch of academia. A big dash of Husker sports.

"These are the some of the finest role models in the state of the Nebraska!"

The billing comes courtesy of Jam Larry Puntenev, host of the "Frank Solich Show." About five times during the event, Puntenev makes sure to tell 12,500 middle-schoolers that Nebraska football will, in fact, win its sixth national title next year. Guaranteed.

Now for the role models.

First up is Nebraska Soccer Coach John Walker, who relates the story of his 1999 Cornhusker team, and how it came so, so close to the College Cup, but lost to Notre Dame. So, you know, they didn't make it.

But, Walker vows, NU will make it next year. And the team already is working toward that goal, with off-season conditioning and a fine game against defending national champion North Carolina.

"We dominated," Walker said. So, you know, persevere.

Captured on the HuskerVision boards are a couple of kids going crazy with their official School is Cool Jam hankies. Everybody wants to be a star.

Sharolta Nonen played soccer for Nebraska, and she's here to talk about adversity. Last year she lost her brother, her mother and her grandmother in the course of three weeks.

And she had to decide to either play World Cup soccer or mourn with her family; she chose to play in the World Cup because that's what she had to do and that's what her family would have wanted.

Samuel McKewon is a junior political science major and a Daily Nebraskan senior editor.

To recap: Nonen had three family members die in less than a month, and she still found the strength to play in the World Cup.

Eddie Brown, the lone non-Athletic Department representative to speak at length during the Jam, talks about his achievements at UNL and how to get involved with the Teammates program, which mentors young high school students as long as they, in Brown's words, "don't experiment with alcohol or drugs or, like, have a baby before they get married."

He then sings an excellent rendition of the spiritual "Eyes on the Sparrow." But this girl, about age 11, faces away from him while sitting down on the floor, and talks to the friend directly behind her. She has long hair, but a silver butterfly clip holds it up in a ponytail. She shoots me a look. I give her a nod.

She rolls her eyes dramatically. At me or Brown, I don't know. Either way, she's my heroine of the week.

Former Husker football player Brian Shaw graduated with a 4.0 grade point average. That is an achievement. Not in my wildest dreams could I do this.

"So a lot of you guys have achievement tests coming up?" Shaw asks the crowd.

"No!" most of the students scream.

"OK, well, some of you do," Shaw says.

Shaw tells the students that apti-

tude tests in middle school will determine their future. You know, the California Achievement Test.

They'd better do well on it, he says, because it could mean a great deal in the future. So prepare for them, he says, like you would a game. Get a good night's sleep. Eat well. Study. Because it's very important.

The CAT. Meow.

Eric Crouch is the star speaker. He talks about character. Have character. Be a good person. But do not be a character, a bad person.

"You know, you hear people say, 'Hey, that guy's a character,'" Crouch says. "You don't want to be that person."

Could a character have character? Or are they mutually exclusive? Where's the woodchuck who could chuck wood?

The "Rope Warrior," David Fisher, jumps rope for a living. He gets in a giant bubble while Li'l Red and some volunteer twirl the jump rope around him.

Some people may think the kids got Nonen's message. But they didn't. Not when they're awash with visions of Li'l Red gettin' jiggy and dreams of Crouch are floating through their heads.

Nonen's speech was about the catchphrase "adversity." But her experience was more unflinching tragedy. It's wrong to condense death into one

word because it fits nicely in coachspeak.

Nonen did her experience justice. Her speech was the only one worth driving five hours from Ainsworth to hear. But the ceremony buried the message by putting her first and surrounding her with mindless entertainment. Next time, they should invite Holocaust survivors and have them talk right before Li'l Red stands on his head, or maybe victims of racism—Anything to hit the message home.

There's a teacher waiting to take her children out into the Devaney concourse, where they will then file into school buses. I have to ask, even though I know the answer: Did the students like the show?

"Oh they loved it," she says.

"I'll bet they enjoyed this more than they did a whole week of school," I say.

"I wouldn't doubt it," she says.

Nor would I. And if a teacher says that, what does that say about education? At the very least, athletes hold the ability to motivate, while teachers' words apparently fall on deaf ears.

So maybe the Ninth Annual School is Cool Jam was just as it should have been: a precursor to the blowout 10th anniversary of the event, featuring the High Impact squad and, some people who can spin a bunch of basketballs on their bodies.

April 9, 2001; 10:00 a.m.

Can't hardly wait.

Multicultural madness

Then I was told the trick side to this shindig ... in order to leave I had to sing



I did something out of my normal, dreary routine a few days ago. What was this exciting new adventure? For an hour I hung out at a Karaoke Vietnamese Cafe shindig. I had picked up a flier from a fellow student during class and the prospect of seeing authentic Vietnamese dress enticed me to stay away from my dorm and go to the Culture Center.

As I entered the converted church, the sound of loud music engulfed me. Students were shouting at each other during the karaoke, and everyone was smiling congenially. I wore Key overalls with black boots and sunglasses, a complete contrast to the white shirts, slacks and Vietnamese dresses prevalent at the scene.

After getting a sugar-laden pastry and a scrumptious meat roll, I sat down at a far table and watched the bikini-clad women on the television.

I was delighted. I looked around the room and basked in the karaoke madness. But then I was told the catch: In order to leave, I had to sing a song.

A nice young woman named Jasmine brought over the karaoke disks. I ended up looking down the lists of songs for something I knew. Anything I knew. "Like A Virgin" was the only thing I recognized until seeing "Hotel California," which saved me from total degradation.

Yeah, I could have walked out that door without singing anything, but that would be quitting. I've never done karaoke before, and I wasn't too thrilled to try. However, Jasmine and her friends promised not to laugh too hard.

Thank God no more than fifteen people would witness my terrible performance. My eyes locked onto that screen, and I sang the words I knew by heart. The microphone squawked and I could feel my dignity lying on the floor. Then, someone was singing backup for me. I was astounded. I saw that two or three people had microphones behind me and were doing the chorus. They all smiled.

The song ended and everyone congratulated me. One guy asked if I was in a band. Jasmine told me I was good. Oh, the wonderful, gracious liars. I sat down and drank some of that weird iced coffee.

Then Jasmine asked if I wanted to sing a duet, in Vietnamese. I know some Espanol, some Deustch and a spattering of Latin. Vietnamese was never on my "to know" list.

My first thought was, "Haven't I been humiliated enough?" Apparently not. So I sang with Jasmine and slaughtered all the words, even when I sang softly enough to be unintelligible. There was one line in the entire song where I hit it just right, even to my ears. I had no clue what I was singing, but everyone was smiling, bebopping along and talking really loudly. It was great.

I also talked with Jasmine a bit. I learned that the Vietnamese who immigrated out of country still call the capital Saigon instead of the communist name, Ho Chi Minh. I learned that the duet songs being played were as big as 'N Sync back in Vietnam. I learned that those tasty pastries were called bahn. I learned that it didn't matter to everyone that I couldn't sing, slaughtered their language and drank my iced coffee too fast. It was fine with me just being there.

I won't claim to have had an epiphany about multicultural awareness, but I enjoyed being there among the smiling faces. I enjoyed my iced coffee, and while the atmosphere was loud and I couldn't under-

stand a whole lot, I didn't need to. I watched other people sing.

From my experience, I knew that this was something the university couldn't shove down my throat in its drive to be more "diverse" and racially sound. Singing with the people at the center was something that occurred on its own, thanks to the good folks at the Asian Student Alliance.

You cannot force people to make connections, and you cannot forge new relationships with a fistful of dollars. Multicultural experiences happen because both sides want them to. There is a reward in socializing with someone not like yourself or someone from a different background. It is getting out of the grind and seeing something new. That is the incentive for this kind of experience.

As I left, I turned around and waved goodbye to everyone. The next karaoke was on, and people were singing again. I

don't plan on visiting a karaoke bar anytime soon, but I wouldn't mind dropping by the Cultural Center for another one of these shindigs.



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