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Class Act

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Friday December 2, 2016

Class Act

By Eric Spina

As the lights dimmed for the Dayton Flyers men's basketball season opener against Austin Peay, I found myself immersed in a swaying sea of red-clad, screaming, ferocious fans intent on lighting up the Arena with hundreds of cell phones.

Jumping up and down before tipoff, students in the infamous Red Scare section led the crowd in the chant, "Let's go, Flyers! Let's go, Flyers!" Some sported blue faces. Others had red hair. They waved wacky signs, including one of SpongeBob. All were hard at work electrifying the sold-out UD Arena.

Without a doubt, Red Scare is the most passionate student fan base in the country. I love watching these rowdy students put on a show, whether courtside or in the stands at the Frericks Center, Baujan Field or Welcome Stadium.

Our coaches recruit excellent student-athletes but, beyond talent, intangibles like chemistry, heart, grit and spirit win games and championships. Our spirited and loyal fans — Red Scare and the Flyer Faithful — are part of our competitive edge. You can even call them our secret weapon.

This fall, three Flyer teams won league championships — volleyball, women's soccer and men's cross country. Football and women's cross country finished second in their leagues.

Today, our volleyball team meets Pitt in a first-round game in the NCAA tournament. With 30 wins in 31 games, the Dayton Flyers boast the nation's best record. The Flyers have earned a reputation as one of the elite volleyball programs in the country.

I'm proud of our athletics program — and not just for its success on the court and playing fields. We have a reputation for integrity, and our student-athletes are STUDENTS first. The NCAA Graduation Success Rate (GSR) report on Division I student-athletes, released a couple of weeks ago, places us among the top schools in graduating our student-athletes. Dayton's GSR of 95 in this year's report ranks the University tied for 26th in the nation. It's not a fluke. We routinely are among the national leaders, and it underscores for me that the University of Dayton does college athletics right.

Last weekend, I traveled to Anaheim for the Wooden Legacy, where Flyer fans outnumbered fans from every school in the field, including nationally ranked UCLA.

Even though two of the teams hailed from California, we were the only team with a pep band in the stands. Our band's energetic director, Willie Morris, recruited a few local high school band students to bolster our ranks. The pep band and the Flyer Faithful rocked the house — and spurred the Dayton Flyers on to two key victories.

What makes Dayton Flyer fans so special? Some people say it's because we bleed red and blue. I think it's because we're a true community that is inspired by the excellence and dedication of our family members who wear our colors into competition. Go Flyers!