



Jari-Ann's Words of Welcome  
July 11, 2014

Good evening. As Sarah said, I am Connor's mom, and on behalf of Connor's whole family I would like to welcome you to this 4th annual tournament.

It is so wonderful that all of you could be here. A special thank you to the parents and coaches for making the effort to get your teams here.

I know that some of you knew Connor personally. Many of us here loved him and miss him. I would especially like to thank Connor's friends for putting this weekend on their calendars, and for doing what it takes to join us here. You know how much it means to us, to have you with us.

Some people here did not have a chance to know Connor, especially some of you young soccer players. But we hope that you will know a least a little bit about his goodness by the time you head home on Sunday.

Connor loved sports; he loved soccer. He was peaceful. He was kind. He was fun. He was very tall, a good athlete, a natural leader, and a great friend. He had a big smile, and a big heart. It was a joy to know him.

After Connor died, I found some pretty amazing and inspiring notes that he had written. Some of the thoughts were his own, and some were quotes that he had heard and wanted to remember.

Today, I would like to mention just one line that I found in his notes, and it is this: *Courage is a choice*. Actually, on this shirt I am holding, are those same words, in Connor's handwriting. *Courage is a choice*.

(These shirts will be worn by Connor's friends as they play a soccer game together on Saturday evening.)

We all need to show courage sometimes in our lives. It even took a little courage for me to come to this microphone and speak to you today.

But I wanted to mention this quote now because it speaks a great truth, and it reveals something about Connor. It is also a call to each of us, in our turn, to *choose courage*, in those moments when we need to. And I pray that each of us will have the courage to become the people we are meant to become. The best version of ourselves.

Boys and girls, young people - the world needs you. YOU, in particular. We each have been given this *one life*, this great opportunity to use our gifts and talents to make a positive difference in this world. And *that* takes courage.

Think about it - you have so much to give, so much to share. The key is to try to always be true to yourself. Be yourself; don't try to be anyone else. And being true to yourself often takes courage - at school, with your friends, or when you face peer pressure. Courage is a choice, and I know Connor lived that way.

Just before I give the mike back to Sarah, I want to tell you about two special people who showed courage this year. Our friends, Peggy and Allana MacNeil, are from New Waterford. Peggy is Connor's friend. She is a nurse, and in October, she invited her mom, Allana to travel with her to Tanzania, which is in Africa. They would do some volunteer work there, helping orphans and school children who have very little, and who could use help in so many ways. Well, it took courage to set out on that adventure, and I am so proud of Peggy and Allana, and what they were able to accomplish during their time there. We have made a poster showing a little bit about their trip, and you can see the poster as you enter the gate.

As you may have heard, the money raised from this tournament is used to help people to share in Connor's dream of helping the poor...so that people like Allana and Peggy can get out there and make a difference.

In Tanzania, the money was used for great good, including lots of food and medicine for the orphan children, a new school roof, and a playground at one of the schools. The kids had never been on a swing before, and were they ever excited!

So I tell you that story to help you to know that this tournament is about soccer, but it is also about so much more. It is about celebrating summer, family time, making memories, and friendly competition.

It is also about carrying on Connor's dream of making a difference. As you know, you don't have to go to Africa to make a difference, although someday you just may do that. That was Connor's dream.

But, meanwhile, every one of us here can make the world a better place right where we are - at home, at school, with our team this weekend. So, inspired by Connor's example, I encourage you to always try to

- be positive,
- be true to yourself,
- and dare to be courageous.

That is a great way to live, and a wonderful way to honour his memory.

Enjoy this weekend, and make some great memories together.

God bless you.