

Positionality Reflection

It was my high school senior year, and I had an away game in Cheatham County. It's a fairly rural area and is over 90% white. I have played this team many times; my fellow Black teammates and I have had trouble with them before. Years prior, an African girl on the team was flagged several times for being "overly aggressive" and "endangering" other players. So, my coaches have prepared us for areas with high tension for a team compromised from a primarily Black school. But this time, I was unprepared for what would come out of this parent's mouth. We were playing a regular game in the middle of the season, so the weather had changed slightly. Parents and friends lined the sides of the field with blankets and cozy gear. It was before the half-time was called, and we were up a few points. The other team had taken control of the ball and was heading downfield toward the defensive line. As the opposing team's forward tried to head for a goal, I, a wing defender, met her before she got close, took possession of the ball, and sent it back up the field. This slowed the play on our head of the field, and before the play began to pick back up, a white woman from the sidelines cupped her hands and shouted, "*****, you're gonna let that gorilla take the ball from you?". My teammates within earshot immediately started yelling at her, and other parents began reprimanding her. This was the back left corner of the field, so there was no referee and only a few players. My eyes began to swell with tears, and when we were called for half-time, the defensive line and goalie informed my coach. The parent was collected and kicked out, and the referee and other coach apologized profusely. At the end of the game, which we lost, the other team and passing parents apologized. The ride home on the bus was silent, and the next day at practice, my coach pulled me aside and she gave me a letter from the school on behalf of the woman. She also informed me that other people in the community had caught wind of this and were advocating on my behalf for the woman to be permanently removed from games and to write her apology to me. With no one of my own at an away game, I stood there and was criticized by an adult woman for a soccer play. At that moment, she reminded me of exactly where I was, something as a dark-skinned girl, I never have the privilege of forgetting. But this stark reminder helped inform my passion for justice and advocacy.