

Sisters Unite!: Ursuline Basketball Teams Join for Bonding and Basketball

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When St Angela Merici founded the Ursuline Order all the way back in 1535, she had a very particular vision for the women who would be a part of it. One of the most important aspects of this vision was building an unwavering sisterhood between women who would respect and care for each other. Now hundreds of years later, Ursuline schools across the country are just as dedicated to this mission of creating sisterhood, not only in their own schools, but in the entire Ursuline community.

This year, our own Ursuline Dedham added to this great tradition by hosting Ursuline St. Louis and Ursuline Dallas in the annual Ursuline Sisters Basketball Tournament. For four days, the three schools engaged in incredibly exciting games and fun events ranging from dinners at local favorites to a harbor cruise in downtown Boston, but the impact of the tournament has also spread far beyond the court. Each and every woman who attends Ursuline, and those players who visited Dedham this week, experienced the true meaning of the Ursuline core values – developing a nurturing community spirit and development of the whole person.

The Ursuline Sisters tournament aids in creating and fostering this inter-Ursuline community, providing Ursuline students the opportunity to meet and make lasting friendships with each other. The Ursuline St. Louis Athletic Director, Jen Brooks, states that “my favorite thing so far has been connecting with your Ursuline athletic director Mike O’Connor. We have connected for fourteen years, we are great friends because of this sister school experience...I love the sisterhood we create...”. Clearly, the friendship that is created extends beyond just sports and students at the Ursuline schools. It encompasses the community that St. Angela set out to create by forming true friendships based on mutual interests and connections. Subsequently, these bonds are further evident in the tournament this year between our head coach, Morgan O’Donnell, and the Ursuline St. Louis head coach, Ashley Kroenor. Both of these women are alumnae of their respective Ursuline schools and basketball teams, and they even both played against each other in this same tournament when they were in high school. This unique bond is just one example of how this tournament contributes to supporting strong connections between these sister schools. Clearly these friendships are built to last and to withstand the physical distance that separates them. Morgan commented that now with social media, these girls are able to stay in touch with each other between the yearly tournaments, helping them to further connect. Communities are formed on the basis of strong friendships, and by giving Ursuline students this chance to make new friends from different Ursuline schools, the sisters tournament is fostering the cherished value of community.

Another key value of the Ursuline Order is the development of the whole person, which means learning about oneself through new experiences. This value was first demonstrated by St. Angela herself when she founded the Ursuline Order, which provided women with different opportunities and experiences that defied the expectations of the times. Likewise, the tournament gives Ursuline students the opportunity to discover new cities and meet new people. One student

at Ursuline St. Louis mentioned that she had only been touring colleges around her home, but after visiting Boston she has become interested in looking at schools there. This illustrates that the tournament extends beyond the basketball games, and contributes to each student's desire to explore new horizons.

One of the Dallas coaches, Nikki Nestere, explained that her favorite aspect of the sister tournament is "seeing all the girls engaged together and that even though [everyone] is from different cities and states, there are many similarities in how they act...". The tournament allows Ursuline students to cement their identity by not only seeing their differences, but their similarities with other Ursuline students who are just like them. Furthermore, they see how the core values that are shared among Ursuline schools remain the same.

All and all, the Sisters Tournament is not just about which team had the highest free throws percentage or who scored the most three pointers. It is about the relationships formed between friends and the new aspects of oneself that are found through new experiences. While there are small differences that divide the schools (like the great "ursu-line" vs "ursu-lin" pronunciation debate), at the end of the day we are one Ursuline order, united by the values and mission of St. Angela. We all seek to make the world a better place by graduating strong, educated young women with a strong sense of purpose; they also have a sisterhood standing behind them, ready to support them every step of the way. The Sisters Basketball Tournament is a beautiful and beloved tradition that helps the sisterhood of Ursuline women, past and present, to continue to grow and thrive. We hope this tournament will continue to inspire future generations of Ursuline students to live out the vision of St. Angela in their lives.



Shown: Varsity Basketball players from Ursuline-Dedham, Ursuline-St. Louis, and Ursuline-Dallas.