6-5-2013

Introduction of Joan Boand, delivered at the GVSU Enrichment Dinner on June 5, 2013

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Joan Boand, a coach by accident, a winner by design. One might say she came, she saw, and she won. She was the first woman appointed to the Physical Education and Athletics Department at Grand Valley. She came in 1966 to coach swimming at a new college without a pool and teach everything there was to teach in physical education. She observed male athletes performing their sports as the sports were added to the list. She decided not to remain a spectator. Men who were decision-makers in such matters were, I think, not deeply prejudiced against women’s athletics, they were unaware. Only Joan knows for sure, but she certainly made them aware. You have to know Joan’s competitive, persuasive, and pleasant qualities to understand why she usually wins the argument. She hit the powers that be with a sledgehammer of logic in her advocacy for a women’s sports program. When they recovered she had the program.

There was a problem. She was the only one around to coach. She was so dedicated to the cause that at one time she was coaching softball, basketball, track and field, and volleyball; and her teams won. She coached volleyball for 26 years, compiling a 557-330 record, and her basketball team won four consecutive league titles. And, she was so persuasive she asked for and received financial aid for women athletes, making Grand Valley the first four-year college or university in
Michigan to recognize that women athletes should have the same financial opportunities as men. As the college grew coaches came, and Joan could devote her time to directing women’s athletics.

What is her legacy? She established one of the most successful women’s athletics programs in the country. Grand Valley women athletes have won NCAA Division II titles in five sports and continually win their league titles.

In the macro world of women’s opportunities, she is a symbol. I don’t know if she likes being a symbol because symbols are impersonal and she is warm and friendly. But she is one. At Grand Valley and in women’s athletics in America, she is a pioneer. The ancient Euripides said “Woman is woman’s best ally.” His words proved themselves as women joined women to bring equity in collegiate athletics. Joan was in the vanguard among those who made it happen.

The actor, John Barrymore, said, “The only way to fight a woman is to grab your hat and run.” There were a lot of men grabbing their hats in the early days. Now all of us are grateful that their running opened a field, and Joan and her colleagues claimed it for women’s sports.

Joan is presently retired from an arduous winning career; one that she designed and all around her accepted. She spends some of her time hanging around doing good things for the athletics department. Tonight we recognize her
as the architect of a superior women’s sports program; one that produces victories and championships, continually adding luster to her illustrious career.