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Instructor's Name

ENGL 1013

Date

### Barnhill

I spent the majority of my teenage years in Fayetteville, Arkansas, worshipping Lady Razorback basketball and volleyball. I attended countless sports camps and numerous sporting events there. My favorite place on the campus of the University of Arkansas was Barnhill Arena. I loved everything about that place. I discovered in later years that perhaps it wasn't the arena itself, but rather the memorable experiences I had there. One of those experiences was the Southeastern Conference championship volleyball match in 2002.

This was a rematch continuing its six-consecutive-year run. It was the most famous grudge match of the SEC, the Lady Razorbacks of Arkansas versus the Lady Gators of Florida. Once again, the two teams were fighting for the SEC tournament championship. Arkansas had won only once out of the past five years, but senior Libby Windell and her Lady'Back teammates were determined to change that in 2002. This match had the potential to be Libby's last as a Lady'Back if they did not win.

My friends and I anxiously cruised into the parking lot of Barnhill on that cool day in November. As I gazed at the historic arena, my heart began to pound with excitement, and my hands started perspiring. I was trembling with anticipation because I knew this Arkansas team was one that could actually beat Florida. As I frantically scurried to the doors, a smile fell on my face, stretching from ear to ear. As I opened the doors, I heard it, faintly, but I heard it: I heard the fans' voices in the distance. The voices overflowed with excitement and joy. The sweet

smell of popcorn, sweat, and victory invaded my nostrils. As I walked around the corner, I could almost taste the humidity and perspiration.

As I walked a little further, I saw the view; the stadium bleachers, the vibrant banners, the crazed fans, the noble coaches, the holy court, and the determined players all graced my eyes. It was the perfect setting for the perfect rematch.

The highly anticipated match began much the same as years before with Florida taking game one with a victory. The Lady'Back fans did not give up so easily, continually screaming for their team. In game two, the scorching fire in the eyes of the Lady'Backs was too overwhelming for the Gators, and Arkansas won game two. I had known Libby for a few years, but never had I seen her beam with such radiant joy as she did after that game because she truly believed the Lady'Backs could win the match. As halftime dawned, the arena erupted with shouts and cheers as the players jogged to their respective locker rooms.

The Lady Gators chomped their way to a victory in game three. The flustered faces of the Lady'Back players told the fans that they were shaken, but the players' determined hearts were not so easily broken.

If war were a sport, game four would have been the greatest battle in history. Both teams volleyed long, aced frequently, and dove desperately, but again Florida came out victorious in the game as well as the match. As the Lady Gators leaped and wailed with excitement, the Lady'Backs welled up with tears and soaked in the defeat. The Arkansas fans were as silent as the calm before a storm. The atmosphere had become heavy and almost unbearable. Defeat tasted very bitter compared to victory.

Afterwards, I saw Libby being interviewed by a TV station. The rays of the camera's light highlighted her moist face. She forced out a smile through her crushed spirit. My own

heart broke for her. She had given a 110 percent effort and had come up two games short.

The walk back out to the car was cold in more ways than one. I was hollow inside because I had just watched a friend lose her dreams. The sound of my own footsteps reflected the path that the Arkansas players had just taken, a long haul to the finish.

I had taken that walk back to the car many times over the years, but never did the walk feel as long and as empty. Witnessing Libby lose not only the match but a dream was saddening; however, reminiscing of the past matches that she had conquered forced me to smile.

To some people, Barnhill Arena is just a place where games were played, but to me it is more than that. This trip to the arena to see the SEC championship volleyball match reminded me that, to athletes, Barnhill is like a sanctuary and, to me, it is where I saw dreams become reality and careers ended.