**AWARDS SPEECH**

**FOR**

**ALVIN TURNER**

Ladies and gentlemen, coaches and teachers, family and friends.... and most of all, the incredible **CHAMPIONS**... the East Ascension High School girls basketball team, thank you so much for inviting me here tonight....it gives me great pride to share some thoughts with all of you, and this year.... **ESPECIALLY**... I have **A LOT** to say!!! Many of you may not know this, but, yes, a **loooong** time ago.... I was a student... (**If you want to make a joke you can say**).... **YES.** there **WERE** high schools **waaaay** back when I was a boy... and yes.... basketball had **ALREADY** been invented.... (**Wait for the laugh**) and I was on the boy’s team... of course we didn’t have a championship season like the one this girl’s team is celebrating, so standing here and sharing in this victory has some special meaning for me. It brings me back to the times when I was learning the meaning of teamwork, building community, learning lessons, and discovering the value of hard work. Most of those lessons started or were enforced by our involvement in school sports, but as I got older and found my way in the world, I realized just how valuable it is to be a part of a community like this one.

I will be the first one to admit that I am a fan of basketball, which makes this all the more special to me. I not only played in high school, my family loves the game too, and in fact, one of my sons coaches teams. You can also guess that I must feel comfortable on a court.... in a court.... and speaking of court, I rarely find myself giving speeches... I find that I am a better listener... if you know what I mean... but when I **do** manage to speak in public... I’m in my official judge’s robes....the better to hide my notes... shhhh that’s **MY** little secret.... big pockets... (**Wait for the laugh**).

“To be a champion, I think you have to see the big picture. It’s not about winning or losing; its about every day hard work and about thriving on a challenge. It’s about embracing the pain you’ll experience at the end of a game or a meet and not being afraid. I think people think too hard and get afraid of a certain challenge.” Those words were spoken by Summer Sanders, the former Olympic swimmer. We are very lucky to have a coach like Dennis Chandler... he has taught the members of this team... and of **ALL** of the teams that he has coached, to follow that good advice. I think you girls have discovered the secret to Coach Chandler’s success.... he’s demanding, he dedicates himself 24/7 to his coaching, his team members and his sports, He lives, eats, and breathes basketball, and he can spot a winner.... or winners. I’ll tell you another thing about Coach Chandler. He **sees things** that others may miss.... i don’t mean that he has any strange talents, but he has a knack for observing a player and seeing the future. He has the true spirit of a coach and each time a new player... or a return player meets him, he can tell very soon what it will take to get the best results from that individual... he knew at the beginning of this season that this team was one of the best he would ever have the chance to coach.... and he was right.

The women’s soccer star, Mia Hamm has said, “I am a member of a team, and I rely on the team. I defer to it and sacrifice for it, because the team, **NOT** the individual, is the ultimate champion.” I want to acknowledge the entire community and especially the parents, families, and friends of the girls on the team, because really, you played an important part in this year’s success. Thanks to your support, the members knew they had encouragement... or they knew they had to rise to the challenge of listening, learning, practicing, and performing. Everyone in this room is a part of this community... the **TEAM**... that brought home this victory.

As I have been thinking of what I wanted to say to you tonight, What came to mind was an image I had while watching one of the semi final games you played. I watched as each one of you gave your all on the court. Individually you did your best, but clearly, as a team, you were stronger and so much more effective. The goal of any team sport is to strengthen and unite the **WHOLE**.... to create **ONE** unit made up of many parts, all in sync, all having each other’s backs, all working towards the same end result, and when that sweet spot is achieved, **MAGIC** happens. It also reminded me of the image of a pearl. Alone it is pretty, but when placed together in a strand to form a necklace, it becomes functional.... makes a stronger impact.... and each individual pearl increases in value because it is an important part of a much bigger and more impressive object. I’ve also read that oysters make pearls from the sand that forms inside their shells. Simple grains of sand with the potential to transform.... your individual talents and abilities are like those grains of sand, and with encouragement and hard work, you too, have learned to find your value.

On the surface, the pearls all look the same...to the untrained eye, but if you look closely, you see that some may have smoother surfaces while some have a gritty texture.... the colors are slightly different, and although jewelers do their best to categorize each type, size, and color, the same goes for all of you. To people that might not know you, you may be just the girls basketball team.... but as the word gets out, your skills begin to show and shine, and if I had to compare this team to a pearl necklace, I would start by noting that your characteristics work together to reflect each other and shine on. (**You can talk a bit about each girl here - as you had mentioned**). When you line up as a team, before each game, I see East Ascension’s first “string....”\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

Each one of you team members are unique. You bring your own special set of skills, awareness, and potential to everything you do. Each year, the team that is formed is also unique, and this year, you girls, along with Coach Chandler, discovered the key to success.... you worked really hard and you **DID IT**!!! For the first time in the history of East Ascension High School, our girl’s basketball team won the state championship!!! That is really so great... and I am saying it again because I want you to also realize something.... there’s no denying that the achievement is **INCREDIBLE**... and **THIS** is the time to work **HARDER**... Now you’re on the “radar...” and teams throughout the state will be analyzing **YOUR** moves as they try to figure out the “**secret sauce**” that was involved that brought you to this wonderful victory.

But now there’s a catch.... this first string of basketball stars provided a shining light **THIS** year. This season is gone. Tonight we honor you. Tomorrow it’s **BACK TO WORK**. You are **just beginning** to grow and discover your strengths. Remember that participating in sports is another ... definitely more fun... way to learn and to develop the skills and characteristics you will need as you get older and move on to the next parts of your lives. **EVERYTHING** you do provides you with the opportunity to learn and to get to know yourself a little better... I’ll bet you girls have all discovered a little more self confidence... a little more swagger... a little more willingness to stretch yourselves, to reach out and try something new. Believe me, you will **NOT** be a champion in **EVERYTHING** you attempt. You’ll make mistakes... you’ll miss rebounds... you might not be as fast as you thought you could be... keep in mind mistakes are all part of it.... just try not to let them happen in the playoffs!!! (**Wait for the laugh**). But seriously... think of a mistake as an acknowledgement that you **DID** something, note the correction, be responsible for your actions and how you fix them, and **learn**. And if you’ve been paying attention, you’ll notice you’re learning about sportsmanship.... **sportsPERSONship**??? (**Wait for the laugh**), integrity, accountability, honesty, the importance of practice to achieve accuracy, respect.... each lesson learned helps you to advance to become a fine, upstanding adult. I recently read something. It said.... “I never really look at anything as a mistake. It’s just helping the path; it’s shaping and sharpening the tools.”

Ladies (**Would you rather say, “Team?”**) ... you’re not only the “Talk of the Town,” you’re also the “Toast of the **ENTIRE** state!!!!! Your victory will go down in the record books of this school, of Gonzalez, and of the state of Louisiana, and we are all so proud of all of you. Now it’s time to accept the awards and praise, but remember to use all of the good thoughts and congratulations to reach for goals you never dreamed possible..... because your potential is only limited by your abilities to imagine, set goals, and work hard to achieve. Congratulations again on a remarkable season and thank you all!!