

Sports Day Fun!

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My schools annual Sports Day was being held on 3 May 2013 and I couldn't have been more excited. Sports Day meant no lessons and a relaxing Friday before kicking off the weekend. At the time, I wasn't too concerned about the actual Sports Day as I remember my own, back in South Africa, being rather boring. If you weren't competing then the only real excitement was when your friends were doing an event or when the final relay races were being run. I was hoping this Sports Day would be different, and different it certainly was.

I remember for the weeks leading up to my Sports Day we were required to participate in every track and field event. This way, the top people in each Grade could be chosen to compete on the day. I've never been very sporty and was pretty much useless at everything. I can clearly recall the first time we had to throw a javelin pole - it was horrible. Every second person managed to hit themselves on the back of the head when throwing it, including me. As for my shot-put throw, it barely left the circle. I think the only event I ever qualified for was Long Jump, which is surprising considering I was one of the shortest people in my class.

Remembering my Sports Day made me wonder how my girls were going to do in theirs. Any lessons we have had that mentioned the word 'exercise', had them gasping in horror, as if exercise was the worst thing you could possibly impose on them. Added to that, I hadn't seen any of them practicing with any sort of equipment you would use on a track and field day, so I had no idea how they were going to pull this off. I made a mental note to stay clear of any areas where they were required to throw things. So essentially, the Javelin and Shot Put areas were a no-go. I really didn't fancy phoning home and telling my mom I had been pegged by a Javelin on Sports Day, she would either demand I come home or point and laugh, neither of which I would enjoy.



On the Friday of Sports Day I arrived at school to absolute shock. I was expecting all the girls to be in their PE uniforms ready for a track and field day, I could not have been more wrong!

Again, South Korea surprised me with another cultural difference and again, it was fantastic! Whatever ideas I had about Sports Day were completely wrong and I was so happy to hear it.



The field was scattered with girls all dressed up in themed clothing to represent their classes. Even their homeroom teachers dressed to the theme which was of great amusement as some of the male teachers were parading around in pink skirts. They put so much effort into their outfits and all of them looked incredible. I couldn't stop smiling and just wanted to take photos of everyone! Similarly, being the foreign teacher, all my students wanted photos with me too which really made me feel like a celebrity (being a teacher in South Korea does wonders for you ego).

The days events started with the running races which were incredibly exciting. These girls could move and every time one of my students won a race I wanted to cry. As much as you don't want to admit it, being a teacher makes you start caring for your students like a mother, and even though there are times you want to pull your hair out in frustration, you adore them and only want the best for them. So, after all the running races I was waiting for the Javelins and Shot-put balls to be brought out, instead, and to my absolute surprise, there were long jump ropes, arrows and dodge balls. Sorry, what?

What I didn't realize is that Sports Day in South Korea is very different to that at home. The events are traditional Korean games that have been around for years, the most popular being the jump rope (where the entire class jumps at the same time), Tuho (투호) (where arrows are thrown into a large canister) and a game very similar to Dodgeball. In addition they also did Long Jump, a 3 Legged Race and Tug-of-war. These activities were far more fun to watch than the traditional track



and field events I was used to. You could see how much fun the students were having and more importantly, they were events where nobody was excluded for not being very 'sporty'. I also thought it was great as everybody competed as a team.

That day I had the chance to relax in my office but there was so much excitement happening outside, I didn't want to be anywhere but on the field with my girls. To watch them outside of classroom just being themselves and to be able to interact with them on that level was one of the most rewarding days of teaching yet. I love my school, I adore my students and I think Sports Day in South Korea is the definition of FUN!

