



Three years. When I first discovered the Julie Foudy Sports Leadership Academy (JFSLA) in 2012, it would be three years before my daughter Elizabeth would be able to attend. Why was I so excited about this camp? There are plenty of good soccer camps in the area, but this one was different.

First, it was Julie Foudy, a pioneer for women's sports as an athlete, advocate, and ESPN analyst. But the camp offered more than just an opportunity to play soccer - it included in its curriculum service, leadership, and teamwork, all strengths young women can use during these formative years of emotional and physical growth.

So it would be three years before she could be part of the academy. But then in 2013 we got lucky. The JFSLA program includes a Choose to Matter contest, where campers develop and carry out service projects in their communities and submit those projects in the competition. In 2013, JFSLA and Century Council added a new category to the contest - a Mother-Daughter project where you did not need to be a camper to participate. Elizabeth decided on her project: the Ankeny Miracle League and Playground, in honor of her friend Ryann. She worked hard to collect money in our neighborhoods. Then our amazing families, friends, schools, and community got on board and helped vote Elizabeth into the finals. From there, the judges selected Elizabeth's project as the grand prize winner in her category. We were going to the Florida Special Olympics to meet Julie Foudy!



Elizabeth and the five other winners from California, Illinois, Georgia, and New Jersey met for the first time that Friday at Walt Disney World. By Saturday night, you would never have known they'd just met. Common interests in community service and, of course soccer, bonded these girls. So Elizabeth spent the weekend admiring Julie and these other wonderful young women, and I sat back in awe at what an opportunity this was for her to learn from all of them. Part of their weekend was spent working at the Special Olympic soccer games and running a soccer clinic for the athletes.



This interaction was also wonderful to see, with my nine-year old leading warm-ups with Julie and working directly with athletes on their soccer skills. Although she was a bit shy and nervous at the start, she took full advantage of this opportunity and enjoyed every minute with Julie, the other winners, and the athletes.

So now we're both counting the days until she can go to camp. Two years . . .

Written by Katie Overberg -

Additional photos and video can be found on Facebook through JFSLA.