

I PLAYED FOOTBALL WITH THE VIENNA BOYS CHOIR

It was a very special day and at age 77 I've had a lot of them, but nothing like the 10th of November, 2012. The Vienna Boys Choir had performed in Eldon the night before and they had the next day free before moving on to their next performance. They spent the morning using Skype to call their parents and after lunch the bus took them to Camdenton to watch the Lakers play football.

About four the bus pulled up to Osage Hills Church and the boys poured off of the bus and into the church gym and basketballs began flying at the six baskets, soccer balls caromed off the walls, a giant Nerf ball bounced off the ceiling and a football was thrown my way. The football had a tight spiral on it and the boy who threw it had a grin on his face as his eyes met mine.

The young man who accompanies the choir asked if it was okay for the kids who didn't want to play basketball to play in the parking lot outside. Once permission was granted an exodus of all but ten of the kids headed outside. The young lady who accompanies the choir and the choir's director joined the outside contingent with a volleyball and spent the next hour hitting it back and forth.

Meanwhile I learned that the young man I was tossing the football with is named Chandler and he's from Virginia. He quickly assembled eight of the kids and organized a game of touch football. I served as center for both teams. The enthusiasm they put into their performance the night before was equaled, if not out done as one touchdown after the other was scored.

If you saw the performance you will recall a very tall boy in the back row. He proved to be my height and did not engage in any of the traditional sports. He organized a game of Cops and Robbers. After the football game ended I was invited to play tag. I declined.

I went back inside and observed that the basketball game was very organized and divided into four fifteen minute quarters. The boys were not highly skilled, but no one was shy about shooting. They did a pretty good job of officiating themselves, with only a few flashes of temper at some rough play that wasn't called. In the fourth quarter the chaperone pulled himself

from the game and his substitute was the conductor. He too, was not embarrassed to shoot and competed with a lot of energy.

The neatest sight was of the very small boy who conducted one number the night before did not bother to go to the offensive end of the court, but hung back like I once saw Wilt Chamberlain do. When the ball got to his end of the court he was all over the kid with the ball and managed to steal the ball several times.

When the game was over the kids came in from the outside and all the balls were put in play. Chandler got me in a game of Keep Away with two of his buddies, while another of the boys kept throwing me a basketball and wanted to play catch. This free play time was suddenly brought to a halt at 6 o'clock and the kids quickly got their possessions together and loaded onto the bus.

I was touched when Chandler and several other kids came up to me to shake my hand and thank me. What a special two hours I was privileged to have with some extremely talented young boys.

The objective of having the play time at the end of the day is that the boys fall asleep quickly as the bus progresses to their next performance venue. I managed to make it home without falling asleep, but had no difficulty getting to sleep once my head hit my pillow.