

LITTLE SAM MAKES GOOD

By: Larry Walker

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One of the drawbacks to growing up in a small southern town, the son of a prominent citizen, and with the same name as your father, is that, invariably, you acquire the moniker, "Little." And so it was that Sam Nunn, son of the "Mr." Sam Nunn, a prominent and the "go-to" attorney in our area, was known for a long time by the adult folks in Perry as "Little" Sam Nunn.

He was little Sam when he attended Georgia Tech, Little when he came back to Perry to practice law, Little when he became a husband and father, Little when he chaired Perry's Chamber of Commerce and was instrumental in starting and shepherding a bi-racial committee who he co-chaired with Richard Ray, became a successful lawyer, served on the board that gave us the Houston Lake Country Club and was a founder and board member of the First National Bank. Then he was elected to Georgia's House of Representatives, where he served for four years. Still, to the Perryans, he was Little.

But, lest I over-emphasize this, let me assure you that from an early age, Little Sam was the object of much attention by adults and students, alike, and the question was not whether he would be outstanding, but exactly what he would do to make us proud. It was not a question of "if." It was a question of "what."

And, of course, when Little Sam was elected to the United States Senate, and with the death of Mr. Sam, a few years earlier, the "Little" was relegated to the memories of a few, old Perryans like me. But, it is Little Sam that I write about today, and not the Senator Nunn who could have, with a little luck, and should have been President of the United States.

Perhaps a good starting point is 1956. I was in the eighth grade, Perry Junior High School, and Sam was a senior at Perry High School. Academically and athletically, Sam had, as expected, amassed an outstanding record. Let's look at what was going with Sam at that long ago time.

A look at Perry High School's yearbook, the 'Panther '56," is in order. This is part of what was written about Sam Nunn: "Sincere in all he undertakes. Always a great success he makes." Basketball 2,3,4, Captain 3,4, Allstate 3,4, Class President 1,2,3, Vice-President 4; Golf 1,2,3,4, Low score 3, Beta Club 3,4." You should be beginning to get the picture.

Let's focus on basketball. I take my information from Billy Powell's book, "Pride of the Panthers." In the district championship game, Perry defeated its old nemesis, Fort Valley, with Nunn scoring 18 points and then in the State Tournament finals, against Valley Point, Nunn got 27 in a Perry victory, 81 to 52. This is a team that, during the regular season, where it did not lose a game, defeated the likes of Warner Robins, Middle Georgia College B-team, Southwest (Atlanta), West Fulton (Atlanta), Lanier (Macon), Griffin, Smith (Atlanta) and Murphy (Atlanta).

Outstanding student, good young citizen and great athlete. In addition to basketball, Perry won the state golf tournament with Sam on the team. As aside, lots of golfers over lots of years since 1956 have learned the hard way of Sam Nunn's golfing prowess.

And, then, Little Sam was off to Georgia Tech in the fall of 1956 to be greeted during his freshman year with requirement that all male Tech freshmen were expected to participate in Tech's Freshman Cake Race, which, at that time, was a cross country race.

Sam had never run cross country and was not on Perry High's track team. But participate in Tech's 1956 cake race he did. And whether he was motivated by winning the cake or getting to kiss Georgia Tech's Homecoming Queen, if he won the race, I do not know. But, I do know that he won the race as the archivist at Georgia Tech have a picture of Sam holding his "winning cake" and kissing the Queen all at the same time. Actually, I do know why he won the race: pride, determination and the desire to win. These attributes were the things that folks in Perry expected of him and qualities he had in abundance.

Lastly, we must mention Little Sam and Georgia Tech basketball where he played on Georgia Tech's freshman team (at that time, freshmen were not allowed to play on the varsity). All he did was to finish the season as Tech's leading rebounder (at five feet 11 inches) and second leading scorer! Pride, determination and the desire to win.

To quote Sam: "I couldn't pass Mechanical Drawing, so I transferred to Emory." In a rare occurrence, Sam encountered something he couldn't master, but this transfer to Emory was fortuitous as he characteristically created an outstanding record at both Emory University and Emory's School of Law.

Little Sam was rapidly becoming just Sam, except to a dwindling number of older Perryans. And, then it was ultimately U.S. Senator Sam Nunn and then

Sam Nunn the American who probably knows more about nuclear proliferation than anyone alive.

Little Sam, you did well. And Sam Nunn, you've done well. You've made the folks in Perry look good. They were right about you all along.

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