

Paul Assaiante Visits Campus

Will Robinson, Nov 17 2010

On Thursday, November 11th, Paul Assaiante, coach of the Trinity College Men's Squash team, conducted a clinic for varsity players and then spoke to the School community about the values he describes in his new book, "Run to the Roar." As the winningest coach in college sports history, Assaiante's mens' squash team has won 12 consecutive National Championships, and his varsity team is currently on a 224 consecutive duel match victory streak.

In his afternoon clinic, Coach Assaiante broke down the game to the varsity boys and girls players, giving them tips and helping with strategy. At dinner with some varsity coaches and players, he talked about how he approaches each season: "It's about the team," he said. "Our first practice of the year is playing miniature golf, so we come to know each other, and have fun." He also spoke about how teams come to depend on each other, one of the reasons he feels his squad has been so successful. Each week he has dinner with groups of his team, and they don't talk about squash.

At his talk to the School that night, Coach Assaiante spoke mostly about dealing with fear, and the lack of importance to winning. He mentioned that while he might believe that he was "special" since he had written a book, and had won championships, he realized pretty quickly that "special" had its own definition: "On the way to my first book-signing this fall at Trinity, I stepped in a big pile of dog-poop; there wasn't anything grand or special about me then!" His story about how poorly he threw out the first pitch at Fenway Park was another humorous lesson in humility.

But Assaiante also spoke powerfully about overcoming fear, about staying connected to your family and friends through all these competitions. His two most memorable statements came about what he had learned over the recent years about diversity and tolerance, since his team brings together students from America, South Africa, India, Pakistan, Colombia, Sweden and more. He talked about what it was like for him and his team at an away match last year, when his players were taunted with ethnic slurs; and he remembered what it was like for his team after September 11, 2001, and the fear some of his players felt on college campuses. Coach Assaiante said that listening to and talking with each player helped them move forward together as a team. We learned a lot from this time with Coach Assaiante - how to hit a squash ball off the back wall more effectively, how to co-exist with fear in productive - rather than crippling - ways, and how to live together with all members of the world more positively.