

Open The Door

by Matt Woolverton

“Y’all are not going to be able to get rid of me.” These are the words I spoke to the former assistant coach of Wheelock Men’s Soccer, a team on which I had no right to be on and for which I ended up playing nearly every position known to the sport. As I sat on the bench after my first opportunity to step onto the field of a collegiate soccer match, I sat contemplating, “How did I manage to get myself into this?”

As a former cross country runner and as an avid fan of America’s pastime, I never would’ve thought that in my freshman year in college I would be lacing up my boots and stepping onto the pitch.

How, you ask, did I manage to sneak my way onto a collegiate soccer team and start games as a freshman after having minimal soccer experience? I got lucky. Wheelock College Soccer was in a perfectly timed rebuilding stage, and a stocky Irishman with little fear of injury was just what they needed.

My grandfather always had a saying, “When someone opens a door, you walk through it.” This means, that if someone gives you an opportunity in life, you take it and make the most of the challenge in front of you.

Because a door was opened, I found myself on a college soccer team. Lucky for me, my challenge was a little bigger than I ever would’ve anticipated. My joining a team and having few intentions for success was a challenge I never could’ve prepared myself for. However, after a brief email to the Wheelock Men’s Soccer Coach and the purchase of a pair of cleats on Amazon, I was on my way to a whole new set of adventures.

In high school, I was cut from my freshman year baseball team. “Matt, What’s stopping you from trying out? You’ve been playing all your life. What’s stopping you now?” my father asked as I nervously sat on the edge of my bed in the corner of my Boston Red Sox themed room. After some convincing I ended up trying out for the baseball team that very next week.

The night after my high school tryout, I stood in my room scrolling through the final rosters on my phone. Varsity, didn't make it. JV, didn't make it. As I stood there I could feel the nerves set in. *How would I be able to beat Frankie Bartow at camp if I couldn't even make the freshman baseball team?* As I continued scrolling down through the roster the disappointment set in. I would not be playing baseball that year. I would never earn a state ring. I would never see my name in the paper.

I was forced to make a decision: sulk at the thought of not being able to play baseball or find another option. Luckily enough for me, a peer I ran with in cross country opened the door for me, and I found myself with a spot on the track team. Twelve seasons and four years of participating in track and field and cross country, I was on my way to competing in javelin at the collegiate level. I was now throwing against professional throwers and having my school buy me my own personal javelin. I call her Carpe for short. Though I was devastated being kept from playing baseball in high school, it turned out to be a positive experience for me. Learning to open the door when I found an opportunity is what brought me the collegiate success and life changing adventures that I now have experienced.

Earlier this year another door was opened for me. I was asked to go to Guatemala with the Wheelock College Athletic Department to film a documentary series showcasing a service learning project the department was participating in. I was asked to film some of Wheelock's student athletes as they worked with children from the Safe Passage program.

By walking through an open door, I got directly on a plane to Guatemala. While in Guatemala, I rode horseback up a volcano, I experienced a new culture, I taught Guatemalan students English, and I met many children who were particularly interested in the length of my hair. However, one opportunity stood out to me most of all.

While in Guatemala I was privileged to see a sport I have grown a passion for, in its truest form. I played soccer alongside Guatemalan children. After a season of struggling through losing, injuries, and the constant force of establishing myself in a new sport, this experience

changed the way I saw soccer. While playing alongside the children who has little understanding of my life experiences or even my language, we found communication through soccer, and a sport I had formerly seen as work and a challenge became a life changing experience.

I played alongside children who live in extreme poverty and struggle on a daily basis yet still refuse to sulk in their troubles. Instead, they make the most of the opportunities they are given, in this case a friendly match of soccer alongside a stocky Irishman with little fear of injury. Because a door was opened for me, I got to travel to Guatemala, learn more about a beautiful game, and understand the importance of living in the moment.

Because I walked through the door, I got to compete against professional athletes in javelin at the collegiate level. Because I walked through the door, I got to compete in soccer after never playing competitively before. Because I walked through the door, I grew an understanding for a culture completely different than my own and developed my newfound passion in soccer.

How will you take advantage of doors opened for you? If someone opens a door for you will you walk through it? Will you sulk when something doesn't go your way, or will you look forward to new opportunities? You can open doors for yourself by joining crew, going to a new activity, or creating a new goal. The hillside is full of open doors, and it is a safe place to explore new adventures. Embrace it, and don't look back. The reason people don't make these choices is because they are uncomfortable or afraid. Put yourself out there, and experience what the world has to offer. Develop a carpe diem attitude. Like those children on the soccer pitch opened the door for me by showing me a new passion, open a door for a fellow camper, a peer, a friend.

Don't turn back when things get hard. Look for the open doors that surround us all during hardship, and keep moving forward. How will you use the hillside to open a door for you? How will you dive "all in" to a door that is opened for you? How will you turn an open door into a lifelong passion or an opportunity for improvement?

Whatever you do with your time here at camp and back at home, I challenge you to take advantage of the world that surrounds you, look for the opportunities that surround you, and,

when someone opens a door for you, walk through it.