

On Saturday, the 13th of June, the sun was beating down and temperatures were projected to break into the 90's. Prepped with sunscreen and water, three friends made the trek from Kingsley Jr. High gym, up the street across ISU's campus, through the field house and down the track to the staging tent for the 100 meter dash at the 2015 Illinois Special Olympics. It was the first time they volunteered for the event.

The excitement was palpable. Athletes of all ages from around the state were competing in one of the most contagiously exciting events we have ever had the joy of being a part of. Our role was to bring athletes from the check-in-desk and stage them in their seats to get ready for their races. Each interaction was amazing, but none more so than one little girl that Jon had the opportunity to meet. He sat Selena in her seat in the second row. She was sure she would win. "I'm the fastest!" she said to him. The other girls around her started to let him know that they too were the fastest and that they were going to win the gold. Each of them was so excited that we couldn't help but sit and talk to them about their day and what other events they were in. They were laser focused and couldn't wait to compete. Sometimes, they became nervous and we would sit with them to pass the time. But we always told them we would be cheering for them. It was inevitable that when the race took place they would look for us at the fence and smile at us. It made our hearts melt. We couldn't believe our eyes as they were flying towards the finish line.

Jon cheered for Selena as she whizzed past the volunteer booth and continued toward the flags at the end of the track. He saw them finish but couldn't see who won. He returned to the desk to help other athletes prep for their turn at the event. About ten minutes after Selena's race, Christine said, "Jon, you have a visitor." There was Selena standing at the gate to the tent with a huge smile on her face and a medal around her neck! She wanted to come back and show Jon her 4th place medal and he couldn't have been more proud of her. She also took a picture with Jon, her biggest cheerleader. It definitely brought tears to all our eyes.

On that scorching Sat in June, three friends had the opportunity to share in one of the most unforgettable events in each of their lives. As for Jon, he will never forget that amazing little girl and her contagious smile.

