

Coach has message for spirit and life Web Posted: 07/18/2008 10:10 CDT

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A man comfortable in the pulpit and on the podium, John Valenzuela spoke to a crowd of 55 on Wednesday about one thing he believes will help anyone achieve their goals: faith.

Valenzuela was the featured speaker at "A Night of Inspiration," sponsored by Exit 10-IH Realty at the San Francisco Steak House at 10233 Sahara.

Citing Bible passages, sports metaphors and famous quotes, he delivered his speech in the Crystal Room, a transparent glass space in which the evening light came in behind a wall of rock and waterfalls.

Valenzuela is the head basketball coach at Madison High School, taking the Mavericks to the state finals in back-to-back years, 2007 and 2008. His students call him "Coach Val." On Sundays, he is the pastor at the Faith & Five Stones Bible Church.

State Sen. Leticia Van de Putte, Valenzuela's sister-in-law, introduced him as a man with "special gifts," who could help teach those in the crowd to "keep on track and be whole for their families and organizations." Valenzuela said his principles would help them reach their potential, using his own life as an example.

Several years ago, his house was in foreclosure, he didn't like his job, and he and his wife yearned for children never born. Today, he has six adopted children, a job he loves and a comfortable home.

He credits the turnaround to faith and five truths.

The first is a proper mental attitude, which he said is more important than talent, skills and appearance.

"My faith in God gives me an attitude," Valenzuela said. "My God is bigger than my problems. If my God is bigger than my problems, then I've got the advantage."

Valenzuela told the crowd a little-known fact to prove his point: He never played basketball, getting cut after his tryout; he played football.

His second principle was "The way of the child is not the way of a champion." Valenzuela said people should learn to put childish ways out of their lives. When that happens, he said, they'll learn to act as adults, placing them one step closer to becoming a warrior who would evolve to a champion who "only needs an opportunity to succeed."

He followed with his third and fourth lessons: "To win, you must take bold and rapid action" and "The true champion thrives on competition."

"You're in some kind of battle every day," Valenzuela said. "It's a matter of life and death, survival and destruction."

Not every one was on his bandwagon when he took over the job at Madison. Some parents didn't believe he could turn the program around, many still smarting from losing seasons.

"Do you know who we are?" one father questioned Valenzuela after he said he'd take the team to the final four.

"Do you know who we're going to be?" Valenzuela responded.

He said he's only had one player miss his 6 a.m. practices during his tenure.

Sick players and bench warmers get up at 5 a.m., he said, on the off chance that they'll get playing time on game night.

"They want to be part of something bigger than themselves," he said.

His final tenet was "Champions have an unwavering commitment and courage."

Valenzuela challenged the crowd to boldly take charge of their lives, using the story of David versus Goliath. He said David



Bahram Mark Sobhani

Madison High School head basketball coach John Valenzuela talks at a Night of Inspiration event July 16 at the San Francisco Steak House.

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saw an opportunity, seized it, and went and did it.

"Your challenge is to discover the truth that you can, find faith and have God on your side," Valenzuela said. "No matter how tough it is, get up one more time."

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