

THE LAST PRACTICE

By: KRISTINA MCMICHAEL-SCHWANT
MCMICHAEL TEAM

Tuesday night was my son's last 8th-grade basketball practice. Just like previous weeks, I sat on the gym floor, checked my email and watched. To even have enough kids to form a team, every boy in his class had to agree to play. For the last two years, this team's head coach was one of the parents and having no coaching experience, some people just find their spot.

My son started to play basketball in the 5th grade, at a larger school. Gavin had liked basketball and joined the team until after one practice the coach said he didn't seem to have a strong interest in playing. Gavin didn't say much but decided to quit after the next practice. At this smaller school, all the boys were needed to make a team, good or bad.

I don't remember the Jaguars winning even one game last year. What I do remember is a lot of frustration and the coach yelling during one game, "Take the lid off the rim!" It was painful watching the ball go up towards the basket 1, 2, 3, 4 and even 5 times in a row without making any points and then down the court it went in the other team's hands.

I'm sure you can imagine the amount of blaming and yelling that followed on the court and at school. When this criticism started during a game, the coach would just take a seat and put his hands up over his head. Usually, we were ahead the 2nd quarter and then, what the parents' section called, "the wheels coming off the bus" would happen. Some games, the wheels were flying off that bus.

Last week's practice was probably to be the last if this team didn't win the next game to stay in the Championship Tournament. At the beginning of practice, Coach started a drill where each player would do a layup and the second player would pass the ball while running back in rotation as fast as they could. I did notice this drill was lasting a long time and the sweat was starting to roll. The team was hot, frustrated and exhausted, but Coach just stood watching so the drill would continue.



The whistle blew, after an amount of time I was unsure of, and the coach yelled, "FINALLY 10 BASKETS IN A ROW! Gather around." He said, "I didn't tell you what I was looking for because I shouldn't have to tell you what I am looking for. Only two of you kept trying the whole time and did not give up." He went on to explain, "It took an hour and seven minutes for each of you to care about what you were doing.

It took an hour and seven minutes for each of you to **do your best at the same time.**

It took an hour and seven minutes to **make 10 baskets in a row.**

It took an hour and seven minutes for you to **act as a TEAM."**

That practice did turn out to be the team's last practice. The Jaguars played in the Championship Tournament which they started in the last bracket. They did not win to continue, but each and every member of that team had significant plays. It was a real nail-biter until the last seconds when one more shot would have won the game.

After the game, the parents started texting each other and this was sent to the whole group by our coach.

This quote is from the movie, "Remember the Titans" and is what the coach said about a player's lack of ability...

"Don't you dare say sorry, he was wonderful in his own way. He added an amazing amount of value. The most important thing is that he learned and grew from it. Made memories for when he is 40 years old and broken down like me! His smile was contagious, and he was always there for his team. Every single young man on this team added value in their own way. I can speak in-depth and each and every one of them for anyone that doubts me. Long story short is I know you are their parent but as their coach, I always have their back, even when they are 40."

There is a new basketball goal in our back driveway where Gavin has spent around an hour every night, since that last practice, with headphones on making baskets. His strong talents are in science, and high school is next year where to get on the team would be nearly impossible. He must have known it was the last practice for him. It all must have meant something.



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