

# Child's Play

## INSPIRED BY MARK 10:2-16

The school hired a new coach. He came out of retirement after Coach Mike moved to a new division. He is larger than life standing over 6-feet tall with a halo of silver hair and crystal blue eyes. He has an aura of calmness, unlike the other young coaches of recent years. Kind of like how some of the students picture the Angel Gabriel. Some doubted he would be tough enough to whip the team in shape. Others suspected the calmness was a disguise hiding a bear underneath. A group of first-string players approached the new coach and asked, "Is it OK for us to only play half the season if we don't have any chance of making the playoffs?" They were testing him to see just how much they could get away with. He replied with a question allowing them to provide an answer. "What were Coach Mike's rules for you in years past?" They replied, "Coach Mike allowed his best players to bug out if we were on a losing streak, and he played the younger team members to save us from the humiliation."

But, the new coach challenged them, "Might it have been because of your pride and lack of motivation that he made that rule? From the beginning of sports in this school, there have been teams made of good players and not-so-good players. The years that we went all the way to the championships wasn't because all the team players were perfect. It was because all the players worked perfectly as a team. None thought they deserved better than the others. All wanted each one to succeed, therefore they were in it for the right reasons and they played as one. So when they took to the field, they weren't a bunch of individuals competing to be the star of the show, they were like one being. They were in sync, and when those players joined together, no team could defeat them."

Back in the locker room after practice, some new players again questioned Coach about this. He said to them, "Whoever is more focused on personal success and popularity has already dismissed the team's success and has set us all up for a loss. Focusing on being #1 on the team almost guarantees that our team won't be #1."

The next week, Coach brought his guys to watch a Little League practice. The young players cheered on their teammates who were struggling and falling behind. The last player to finish the warm-up laps was patted on the back by the ones who finished first. They applauded their efforts and encouraged them. The onlookers from the older team laughed and made fun of it all saying, "They'll never make it to our level. Those weak guys are bringing down the team. The strong ones should be pushing them to step up their game, or they should kick them off the team."

When Coach saw this, he pulled his team aside and said to them, "Let this be a lesson to each of you. If anyone comes to me saying you were putting down a teammate rather than building up the team, don't think I won't prevent you from playing in the next game. It takes each and every player to make it to the top. Whoever loses sight of that and gets caught up in their own agenda won't remain on this team. Then, he spoke out to the Little Leaguers and commended them for the tremendous team spirit. He told them, "This kind of supporting, encouraging, and inspiring each other makes you all lasting winners!"

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