



DR. WILSON'S CLASS

It hadn't been very long since the guys had been at the truck stop. Normally after a pit stop like that, everyone is wide awake and talkative. Tonight, was no exception, but some of the players had tests coming up that they needed to prepare for.

"Hey Brandon, are you going to play cards with us in a few minutes?" asked Chaz.

"I don't think I'll be able to, thanks. I have a bunch of homework to get done."

"Oh, my goodness, what a nerd!" Chaz joked.

"True story but probably one of us should see an 'A' at some point in our lives," Brandon snapped back.

"Okay, okay, haha, everyone's a comedian. You know this college thing wouldn't be so bad if we didn't have to go to class."

"Yes, and mornings wouldn't be so bad if they were later in the day."

At this point, Brandon's roommate Matt decided to chime in and get in on the banter.

"Or, as my Papi used to say, 'if ifs and buts were candy and nuts, every day would be a holiday'," said Matt.

Even though Matt was a year behind Brandon in school, they had roomed together ever since Brandon hosted Matt on a recruiting visit.

Matt had been a solid player so far in his three years with the Eagles. He was well-liked and had a good sense of humor. He would be a fine captain next year when he was a senior and his roommate had graduated.

“Seriously though, you know I’m not much for school, but Dr. Wilson’s class is my favorite,” said Chaz. “When I was in elementary school, my dad would pick me up and he’d ask me what my favorite thing was about the day and I would always say recess. Well, not always. Sometimes, I would say lunch.”

“That’s deep. Thanks so much for sharing something so personal,” Matt snarked.

“Anyway, like I was saying Dr. Wilson is cool and his class is tolerable,” Said Chaz

“Tolerable? That’s some high praise coming from you,” said Matt.

“It is what it is.”

Dr. Daniel Wilson was a very popular teacher at their school. He taught a lot of Physical Education and Kinesiology classes and had a special way of connecting with the students and making his material relevant. Not only did he teach about the world of sports, but always tried to tie it in with life, as well. Many of the athletes liked taking his classes because he wasn’t boring and kept them engaged.

“Do you remember last week in class when we were talking about facilities and getting stadiums and arenas ready for games?” asked Matt. “It’s crazy how quickly they can transform an ice hockey rink into a basketball court and all that goes into getting the grass and the field ready for baseball and football games when those teams have grass,” said Matt.

Chaz added, “What stood out to me was the fact that nobody ever knows who those people are. They also get paid very little, relatively speaking, and yet they have some of the most important jobs of anyone in the organization in order for that game to be played. I know you need players to play a game, but those millionaires don’t play if the field or court isn’t ready.”

“I liked the field trip he took us on last week,” said Matt. “It was awesome to see how it all works for an NBA organization.”

“That was awesome,” agreed Chaz. “Were you as surprised as I was in how much pride those people had in working for that organization? Even though they were getting paid nothing compared to their bosses sitting at desks, or certainly the players, they still enjoyed their work and knew that it mattered.”

“That was a little unexpected,” said Matt.

“After that field trip, Dr. Wilson actually brought that up to some of us. He said they were constantly reminding themselves of how important their work was. They worked as a team to make the game possible for the real team that everybody knows.”

Matt nodded his head in agreement saying, “It was funny how we were supposed to be learning about the nuts and bolts of operating a facility and yet Dr. Wilson found a way to talk about life and team and all that stuff.”

“He even told that story about the old Navy pilot way back that got shot down. Mr. Frank probably knows the story since it’s an old story,” said Chaz playfully.

Despite the fact he was trying to do his homework, Brandon was still half-listening to their conversation. Brandon had never had Dr. Wilson for a class but heard that he was a good teacher.

“My uncle was a Navy pilot,” said Brandon. “What was the story Dr. Wilson told you guys in class?”

“This hotshot Navy fighter pilot finally got shot down after 75 successful missions but survived because he parachuted out. Years later, he’s at a restaurant and this guy comes up to him and introduces himself. The pilot doesn’t know who he is but apparently, this guy knows the pilot. Turns out that guy packed the pilot’s parachute that day,” Matt recalled.

“No way!” said Brandon.

“Dr. Wilson told us that story to emphasize even though we may have a role that seems insignificant, that it can still be very important.

It may not be life or death like this parachute packer and pilot, but it can still be crucial,” said Matt.

“Like my theater teacher my sophomore year always said, ‘there are no small parts, only small actors’,” added Brandon.

“That reminds me that I have to take some kind of performing arts or music class still,” said Chaz. “I’m not looking forward to that. I wish I could just play basketball.”

“Or go to recess all the time,” Matt said with a smile.

“At least I know you were listening to me,” said Chaz.

“That pilot story was interesting to me,” said Matt. “I’m glad that Dr. Wilson shared it with us. He said that on all teams, whether it’s in sports, or a family, or in business, what one person does affects everybody else. He said that we typically think it only matters what the star does not the other players. He also said that most people think the term ‘role player’ is a dirty phrase. That it’s an insult, but it’s just a matter of perspective. A role player is just someone that is playing a particular role. Steph Curry can be a role player.”

Matt could tell by the look on Chaz’s face that he was a little confused as to how an all-star like Steph Curry could be a role player.

“On some plays, Steph Curry is supposed to shoot. On some plays, he is supposed to set screens. On other plays, he might need to make passes. His role depends on what the team needs,” added Matt.

“But isn’t being labeled a role player kind of degrading? It’s like you don’t have any talent,” wondered Chaz.

“That isn’t the way we have to look at it,” said Matt. “A role player has a bunch of talent. Their talent is in that role they are playing. The parachute packer might not have been able to fly a jet, but he could pack a mean parachute. That talent ended up saving the pilot’s life. If we’re a true team, then we want people that help one another out and complement each other. If you have a team full of shooters but no one is willing to set screens, then it might be difficult to get open shots and the team will suffer.”

“I guess it’s all about your perspective,” said Chaz.

Matt nodded in agreement with Chaz's comment and then further explained his thoughts on roles.

"You're right Chaz. If our perspective or our focus is centered on us or were focused on getting recognized in the newspaper or on TV, then we probably don't want to be known as a role player in a traditional sense. I'll tell you what though, being a role player is extremely valuable to the team. If I'm a star, then I want people around me that are willing to embrace their roles and be a star in their roles. If I'm a running back, then I need to treat my offensive linemen well. Those big nasties up front are going to create the holes that I run through. We're all in this together. If we're not all doing our jobs, then we don't all experience success. I once heard it said that it takes ten hands to make a basket. Everybody on the court or on the field has to help one another out."

"I never really thought about that from either perspective. I've always just figured stars are stars and everyone else is just a role player," said Chaz.

"Right, but 'just a role player' as you say, can mean so many things," said Matt. "Remember that a star can actually be a role player on a particular play. Like I said earlier, even Steph Curry might have to pass or screen on a play. If he acts like a prima donna or doesn't want to star in this so-called lesser role then that could cost his team. It could also cost him a chance to accomplish his goal of winning a championship."

Despite needing to study, Brandon was having trouble concentrating on his work. The conversation between Matt and Chaz were interesting to the Senior co-captain, as he thought of a story that would fit right into what they were talking about in regard to player roles.