



LOADING UP THE BUS

For more than a decade, Denny Dunn had counted the Eagles when he got on the bus. He loved leaving early if it was possible, but he also wanted to make sure that he didn't leave players behind if they left early.

"I counted ten," proclaimed Coach Dunn. "Who are we missing?"

"You're joking, right coach?" asked Drew. "We're missing the usuals."

By the usuals, Drew meant James and Antonio. Those two had a habit of being late for everything. They seemed to operate in a world devoid of time, clocks, or calendars.

"Well, they still have a couple of minutes," said Coach Dunn.

"One of these days they are going to cut it too close and totally miss the bus," said Drew.

"We'll deal with that when it happens. For right now, we're lucky that it hasn't happened yet."

"Even though they're our leading scorers, we've been losing, so maybe it wouldn't be so bad if they finally did cut it too close," said Drew. "Maybe our luck would change."

"Our problems are not because of two players," responded Coach Dunn. "Our struggles this year have gone a little deeper than that."

James and Antonio were both similar players, in terms of their athleticism and their versatility on a basketball court. They were both returning all-conference players. Unfortunately, their playing styles and abilities weren't the only things that they had in common. In addition to being late more often than not, they tended to think the world revolved around them both.

Though Coach Dunn was facing the back of the bus talking with Drew and some of the other players, he knew precisely the moment that James and Antonio boarded the bus.

"Game Day, Baby, what, what!" James announced loudly.

"Giddy up. Let's go. Let's get this show on the road. Time to hoop!" said Antonio as the two seemed to feed off one another.

There was certainly no questioning their enthusiasm. Even amidst a losing streak, they were boisterous and energetic. Many of their teammates silently questioned their motives for being so enthusiastic.

"Good morning, fellas," said Mr. Frank.

"Good morning Mr. Frank," the guys said in unison.

Mr. Frank had been driving the team for years. He had seen Coach Dunn and the Eagles experience a lot of success. Unfortunately, this season had been the most challenging Mr. Frank had observed throughout the years of serving as the Eagles' bus driver.

"You ready to be the best you can be today?" asked Mr. Frank.

"You know it!" said Antonio.

"I hope so," Mr. Frank responded. "Your team needs your leadership today."

"Don't worry about that. We're ready to get after it. They can't stop us. We're getting a win today," James boasted confidently.

"Glad to hear that fellas. But you know I'm not talking about you making shots. Just making shots don't make you a leader and isn't always what your team needs but I'm sure you'll figure it out. Today is a bright beautiful day. Great day for us to count our blessings."

“Mr. Frank, you say that to us every time we get on this bus. Instead of calling you Mr. Frank, we should call you Mr. Rainbows and Butterflies. You’re one positive guy,” said Antonio.

“I try to be, fellas. There’s just too much negativity in this world. I just want to see you fellas be the best you can be. Now, speaking about being the best you can be, you better hustle back to your seats. Now, as you said when you got on the bus a few minutes ago, ‘It’s time to get this show on the road’. But, then again, you already know it’s time to go because when you get on the bus, it’s always time to go. Literally.”

“Wait, did I detect a little sarcasm there, Mr. Frank?” asked Antonio.

With a smile and in his own little *awwhh shucks* sort of way, Mr. Frank said, “You caught me. My wife says I’m doing better with that but still need to watch myself. Now get on back to your seats. This bus is itching to hit the road.”

Coach Dunn moved to the side as James and Antonio walked past, barely acknowledging him.

“Well?” asked Coach Dunn.

“Well, what?” responded Antonio.

“We’ve been waiting on you guys. Is your time more valuable than ours?”

“We had to grab something to eat. You don’t want us to be hungry and not play our best, right Coach?” asked James.

“I don’t want you to be hungry and I don’t want you to play bad which is why we bring food on the bus for you guys.”

“Yeah, except when we get on the bus there is never much food left for us,” Antonio pointed out.

“Why do you think that is?” asked Coach Dunn.

Antonio and James just stared at Coach Dunn. They didn’t really care what he had to say about this issue and were hoping that the question he just asked was rhetorical. They also hoped he would soon be done talking so they could continue to their seats.

Coach Dunn tried to make his point to the guys, “Maybe if you got on the bus when everyone else got on the bus, there would be food for you instead of your teammates getting seconds and thirds before you slow-pokes decide to get on the bus.”

“Maybe, coach, but why don’t you just get more food next time? Win-win, right?” replied Antonio.

Coach Dunn tended to be more patient than some other coaches but that was put to the test often when dealing with Antonio and James.

“A real win-win would be you guys arriving when your teammates get here and then everybody gets food, we can leave on time, and you don’t have to get lectured by me. Win-win-win! Now please go sit down. We’re already running a couple of minutes late. We have to get moving.”

With that the two players continued past Coach Dunn, rolling their eyes and joining their teammates as Mr. Frank navigated the bus out of the parking lot.