



LEAVING THE GYM

When Coach Dunn got on the bus, it was noisy. Players were interacting loudly, music was being played that should have been quieted by headphones, and there were plenty of cell phone conversations that should have stayed private.

It was bad enough they just lost a game in an embarrassing fashion, but he was unfairly confronted by a parent. To top it all off, Jaylen was most likely out for the season. Now, he had to put up with noise on the bus.

It wasn't even an hour since his locker room tirade. He had no choice but to wonder if they even cared at all.

"Quiet down back there!" demanded Coach. "At least, act like you care that we lost tonight."

"We care," responded Bobbi.

This was the attitude he'd want to see from Bobbi. Even though he was a freshman, he was a starter and seemed to have the right mentality. Coach Dunn had high hopes for Bobbi and thought he had a bright future if he didn't get contaminated by some of the poor habits some of the team's "leaders" demonstrated.

"You might care, but it's obvious that most of your teammates don't care," Coach Dunn said to Bobbi.

He then turned his attention to everybody again.

“You guys think you care but if you truly did then you’d act like it. We just lost a game we shouldn’t have lost and nobody would know it by how you’re behaving right now. Most people might even think you won. You don’t care. You’re not focused. You’re not committed. I’m not even saying that just because of how you’re acting right now on the bus. It’s more than that.”

Coach Dunn was getting more and more frustrated. He had not been able to figure out this team as he had done with past teams. Everything was starting to come to a head, and he had to get a few more things off his chest that he hadn’t said in his short post-game locker room talk.

“If you actually cared, you’d stand up for people when they come to the bench after leaving the game. You’d help teammates up off the ground. You’d practice hard so that you could play hard. You’d act like champions instead of just participants. Sometimes I think this is just glorified intramurals or you’re just playing pickup. No commitment. No investment.”

The stat sheet Coach Dunn was looking at after the game told him about outcomes but the reasons behind many of those numbers and results were often because of these very things he was now talking about.

Coach Dunn continued, “You guys say you care but you just glance over scouting reports. You don’t get enough sleep at night. You criticize one another. You criticize coaches. You don’t rebound for each other during shootaround. Everyone wants their own shots. You don’t touch the lines during sprints. You don’t block out on every shot. You don’t dive for loose balls. No, you don’t care as much as you should. “

Even though he had everyone’s attention now, he decided to use a slightly different approach as he continued.

“You remember those ham and egg breakfast sandwiches we got you this morning. Those eggs came from a hen somewhere that was involved in the process. That hen participated in your breakfast. But

that ham, oh that ham. That ham came from a pig who was 100% committed to your breakfast. That pig was completely invested in your breakfast. Are you like the hen or the pig when it comes to this team? You say you care. You say you are committed but are you 100% all-in or just merely participating and going through the motions? Some of you participate in basketball. You're involved in this sport, but you're not committed like the pig was committed to your breakfast. You'll say that you're committed but people will know when you are committed. You don't have to tell them."

Coach Dunn was on a roll now and he was just getting started on his soapbox.

"Have any of you ever heard of the Spanish explorer Cortez?" he asked.

The players shook their heads but even if somebody knew, they wouldn't dare interrupt Coach Dunn at this point.

"Way back in the day, Cortez and his men landed in Mexico and was attempting to colonize that land for Spain, but they were going to face the mighty Aztec Indians. He sensed that his men were a little bit fearful. To motivate them, Cortez ordered that all the boats be burned. There was no turning around. No turning back. Retreat was not an option. They were all-in. They had each other's backs because there wasn't an alternative. That's a real commitment."

Coach Dunn might have been finished with the Cortez story, but he wasn't done trying to make his point. There was still enough time left in the season for a turnaround. He didn't know if this particular team could change their mentality, but he was determined to keep trying to inspire them.

Coach Dunn continued, "How many of you have ever thrown up because you went so hard? I'm not talking throwing up because you ate something before working out, or because you were hungover, or because you were out of shape. I'm talking because you went so hard. You pushed yourself to the limit. You went beyond what you thought you were capable of. Very few people work hard enough to feel that.

Most people don't outwork their talent. The best players in the world are the best, not because they are talented, but because they maximize their talent by outworking their talent. Whether you can jump out of the gym, run faster than anyone, or you're lacking in physical talents, you can always work harder than your baseline talent. By outworking your talent, average players can become good and good players can become great."

Coach Dunn didn't want to stay too long on this soapbox but as long as he had some of their attention, he needed to take advantage of this moment.

"What about you guys?" Coach Dunn asked the team as they all sat in their seats. "So far this year, all you've done is the bare minimum. You're just getting by. Some of you probably can't wait for the season to end. How do you think that attitude affects your play? You can't have a negative mindset and, at the same time, be positive in your lives. Do you know what the best do better than everyone else? They come early, stay late, and do a little bit extra. They keep fighting when they're down. They refuse to quit, even if things don't go their way. They don't see obstacles, distractions, or impossibilities because they're too focused on their goals. What they want most is much more important than what is easiest right now. They know their priorities and are committed to them!"

What was once a noisy bus just minutes earlier was now eerily quiet. The players sat silently in their seats. Some of them digesting what Coach Dunn had just said, while still a few just waited anxiously for him to finish so they could go back to their own cares and concerns.

"Coach, can I say something?" asked Mr. Frank.