



## MOST VALUABLE TEAMMATE

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**B**randon re-entered the conversation between Chaz and Matt. He had a story of his own that would highlight the importance of all roles on a team.

“I played with a guy named Jordin back in high school. Though he was talented, he wasn’t the star scorer. He did the dirty work. He made the hustle plays. He scored when the opportunity presented itself, but he worked really hard to be the glue on our team. In the playoffs our senior year, Jordin had four fouls with one minute to go in a tie game. He was playing help-side defense when my man broke my ankles, left me in the dust, and drove down the lane. Jordin instinctively came over and helped. He took the charge and, in the process, gave us all the momentum. That was a turning point in the game. There’s a chance the game could have gone into overtime and we would have needed Jordin. He didn’t consider the fact that the refs had been bad the whole game and that this could have been his fifth foul. He didn’t shy away from doing what he needed to do. He played his role and took the charge. We won the game and then went on to win the next two and claim the state championship. I wouldn’t have gotten a ring if not for Jordin. He played his role and because of it, we were all champions.”

“That’s a cool story. I never knew that,” said his roommate Matt.

“Unfortunately, I also played with another guy who missed out on some big-time scholarships in football,” said Brandon. “This guy was a wide receiver and he thought catching footballs was his only role. When the play would be a run play, he wouldn’t be in the same stance or come off the line like he did when it was a pass play and there was a chance he’d get the ball. Not only did good defenses catch on to this but so did college recruiters. Many of the top schools backed off him because they didn’t like what they saw out of him when he had to play the role of teammate, blocker, or decoy.”

Shaking his head, Chaz said, “Stinks to be him.”

“Yes, but it also stunk to be his teammates because you are left to wonder how much better they could have been and how many more games the team might have won if he had been a star in all of his roles, not just the one that he wanted?” said Brandon.

“Makes sense,” said Matt. “It’s like the parachute packer. I bet that guy probably didn’t grow up wanting to have that job.”

“No, he probably wanted to be one of those Top Gun pilots with the cool sunglasses and all the dates,” added Chaz.

“He probably had many days where he felt that the work he was doing was under-appreciated,” said Matt. “He probably thought that his role wasn’t very important.”

“From what you guys said, his role turned out to be very important, like life-and-death important,” added Brandon.

“No kidding,” agreed Chaz.

Even though he should have been focusing more on his homework, Brandon continued to enjoy the conversation. This was stuff that Chaz needed to hear as he had been struggling with playing a specific role on the team. Chaz was called upon to be a defender and rebounder. Very few plays were called for him.

Brandon said, “That pilot has to be glad that the parachute packer didn’t just go through the motions that day. Lucky for the pilot, that

the parachute packer chose to be a star in his role, at least on that day.”

“When I hear that story, I think of David Ross,” said Matt. “Brandon, I know that you were also a big-time baseball player in high school. Have you heard of David Ross?”

“Yeah, he’s a coach or manager, right?”

“He is now, but he gained his fame as a baseball player,” said Matt. “Actually, he was a below-average baseball player, at least from a stats perspective.”

“What do you mean by that? Either you’re a good player or not, right?” asked Chaz.

“That’s not always the case,” said Matt. “Just like we talked about with role players starring in their roles and being valuable members of the team, it was like that with David Ross. Like I said, statistically, he wasn’t very good. He was probably never his team’s Most Outstanding Player, but he certainly was their MVT. Their Most Valuable Teammate.”

“Did you just make that up?” asked Chaz

“Maybe, but it works doesn’t it?”

“Sure. Now, why was David Ross his team’s ‘MVT’, as you say?”

Matt continued with his story, “Twice during his career, Ross was one of the most sought-after free agents in all of baseball, despite having a .229 batting average and ripping only 106 dingers in his 15-year career.”

Brandon’s ears perked up as he heard those below-average statistics.

“How in the world was he sought after if he couldn’t hit for power, or hit at all, for that matter?” asked Brandon.

“He had an amazing ability to inspire his teammates and make teams better,” responded Matt. “Even though he was a backup for most of his career, he got paid. He also got himself two World Series rings, one with the 2013 Red Sox and one with the 2016 Cubs.”

“Not too shabby for a role player,” said Chaz.

“You’re right. In fact, he got carried off the field after Game 7 of the 2016 World Series,” said Matt. “He became the oldest player to ever hit a home run in a World Series game. My family were long-suffering Cubs fans, so I remember this like it was yesterday. His Game 7 home run essentially won the game and the series for the Cubs. First World Series Championship in 108 years. Remember, this was a guy that only had 108 home runs in 15 years of playing and he hits one on the biggest stage in the most pressure-packed situation.”

“I guess he was ready for his opportunity,” said Chaz.

“He was, but he wouldn’t even have gotten that opportunity if he didn’t embrace his role as a team leader regardless of his position or status,” said Matt. “Ross knew he was signed by both the Red Sox and Cubs to be a great teammate, mentor, and backup. He accepted that and it led to him getting two rings on his fingers. He was never an all-star, but I’d say he was a Hall of Fame teammate.”

“I didn’t know that about him but it’s a great story,” said Brandon. “There are probably other stories like that from all sports emphasizing the importance of being a star in a role.”

Matt agreed with his roommate, “Yep. I imagine that the best teams are made up of players that want to star in their roles, regardless of what those roles are. The best teams help each other and pick up the slack for one another. The best teams don’t care who gets the credit. They celebrate successes together. They overcome challenges together. They win and lose together. They make sure that all the jobs and roles are filled regardless of who has to do them.”

“Dr. Wilson would be proud that you guys talked about him and his class so much tonight”, said Brandon.

“Maybe we should push for this conversation to be counted as extra credit,” suggested Matt.

“I don’t think that will work, Matt, but I like the way you think,” said Chaz with a smile.