



SPARK PLUG

Angela came over and replaced Jaylen’s ice pack with an elastic wrap and a knee brace that would secure his knee temporarily until they got back to their home training room. Jaylen thanked her and then continued telling Travis about his freshman year.

“Anyway, Coach knew that my dad was into cars and so he took a shot that I knew something about cars, as well. He asked me what my dream car was. I told him that it was a Lamborghini. He told me something that I’ll never forget. He told me that a little sparkplug costing five to ten dollars could keep that rich-man’s car from running. On the flip side, that little inexpensive spark plug can deliver electric current from the ignition system to the combustion chamber.”

“The what to the why?” Travis asked, obviously confused. “You kind of lost me there at the end. Sorry, I’m not much of a car guy.”

“Sorry about that,” apologized Jaylen. “A spark plug is just something that provides a spark. It ignites an engine. It provides energy. An expensive car can’t run without it. Our team might be talented but if not for energy. If not for spark plugs, then the individual talents on a team are wasted. Without a spark plug, a Lamborghini sits useless in the garage. Every car needs spark plugs. Every team needs them, also.”

“So, you’re the spark plug on this team?” asked Travis.

“Well, I’m one of them,” Jaylen replied. “The best teams have 12 spark plugs. The best teams have everyone giving energy and effort. I do what I can. I hope that my play inspires others and motivates others to play harder, but I can’t make you or anyone else want it. You’ve got to decide for yourself. I do hope, though, that my style of play and effort can be infectious, in a good way, like Angela said earlier.”

Angela was in the corner packing up some equipment but was still listening to the conversation. She smiled when she heard him mention what she’d said earlier. It always made her feel good when the players listened to what she said. She cared about the student-athletes. Not only did she want them to be physically strong and healthy, but she wanted them to develop as people.

Jaylen continued, “We’re either energy givers or takers. We can be a vampire and suck the life out of the team or be an oxygen mask, breathing life into the team. We can complain or go through the motions. We can do the bare minimum, or we can make others better. We can be positive. We can try to generate momentum even when things might seem at a standstill. No matter our talent, we can always provide energy.”

“I’ve seen the success you’ve had with working so hard,” said Travis. “It’s got to be worth it.”

“Just look at some of the best players in the world,” said Jaylen. “They aren’t lazy. They don’t take many plays off. There are plenty of talented players that don’t fulfill their potential. Everyone in college is talented. Everyone in the NBA is talented. What separates the best? What takes certain players from good to great? Talent is never enough. Being a better shooter or dribbler or being able to jump over people doesn’t make a player good. It just makes them talented at those things. If you combine those talents with effort and energy, now you’ve got the potential for a great player.”

Angela finished putting the last piece of equipment into the sports medicine travel bag and then walked over to the two players.

“I have the luxury of watching everything from a distance and observing,” noted Angela. “Jaylen certainly works hard. His energy can be contagious. There are some other players that will do this on occasion, but they aren’t consistent. Jaylen brings it every day, not just when he’s feeling good. In fact, there have been a few times that he’s been sick or not feeling good and you wouldn’t have known it. Travis, if you really want to have this mentality Jaylen talks about then you can do it. It’s your choice. It might not get you more playing time right away, but it’ll another step closer to getting this team where it needs to be.”

“What do you mean?” asked Travis.

“Have you ever been to a huge professional sporting event where they do the wave?” asked Angela.

Travis shook his head up and down. He’d been to a lot of Saturday afternoon tailgates and college football games growing up with his dad and brothers.

Angela continued with her thought, “I bet you’ve never seen an announcement on the big jumbotron asking you to do the wave. You’ve probably never heard the announcer tell you that it was time for the wave.”

“Now that you mention it, I haven’t. How do those things start?” Travis asked.

“Great question. That’s my point,” said Angela. “It starts with one or two people getting one or two people to do it with them. Then another couple of people start to do it and then more. Eventually, you have a whole section and then another and then another and then the whole stadium is doing the wave.”

“All because one drunk yahoo started the wave?” asked Travis.

“Right, except they don’t necessarily have to be drunk or a yahoo, for that matter,” replied Angela. “If you want to influence your team. If you want to be a valuable part of this team whether you’re playing or not. Then, be that person that starts the wave. Be that person that

ignites and energizes your team. Be the change that you want to see on this team.”

Jaylen said, “Be a yahoo, Travis! Start the wave on our team.”

“There’s that but in listening to you talk, not just today, but at other times, I believe that you want more for this team,” continued Angela. “If that’s the case, then let that change start with you. It might be more important than ever now that Jaylen is hurt. Somebody has to pick up the baton and run with it. Somebody has to be the guy that takes over as the spark plug on the court. If not in games, at least in practice, where you can build positive habits. Who knows, maybe you will get the other yahoos in the other sections of the stadium to follow your lead.”

“I think I can be the yahoo this team needs,” Travis said with a smile.

“Awesome,” said Jaylen. “I guess I have a new partner in crime when it comes to trying to infect our teammates with enthusiasm, energy and a desire to work hard.”

“I’m in. Thanks for talking to me Jaylen,” said Travis. “Also, thank you, Angela, for inspiring me to be a yahoo.”

“You’re welcome,” said Angela. “Now, you two better get out of here and on that bus. You don’t want James and Antonio to get on first.”