



## BACK AT SCHOOL

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The bus started to slow down and Learie looked out the window and saw the sign for their exit.

“That’s a sight for sore eyes,” said Learie.

“Almost there. Can’t wait for my head to hit that bed,” said Brandon.

“No kidding,” Learie said. “I only have one class tomorrow. I’m not going to lie. I’m pretty tired. I’m not entirely disappointed we don’t have practice tomorrow.”

“I agree. It was pretty obvious that Coach didn’t really want to see us much tomorrow,” Brandon stated.

“He was a little frustrated with us, wasn’t he?”

Learie then continued with a thought, “I’ve been thinking about something ever since we talked earlier.”

“What’s that?” Brandon asked.

“I think what you and I talked about would be good for everyone to hear,” suggested Learie. “Even though we aren’t having practice, I think we should get everyone together tomorrow.”

“A team meeting?” Brandon asked.

“A team meeting,” Learie said. “But not one of those players-only ones where everyone moans and complains. What we talked about is pretty important. It could spur something on in other people’s minds,

as well. I mean, if it got me thinking, maybe it will get others thinking.”

Brandon agreed, “That’s a good idea. I’ll text everyone right now.”

All across the bus, the sound of dings and beeps could be heard as Brandon’s text message was delivered to his teammate’s phones.

“That’s weird,” mentioned Brandon looking at his phone.

“What’s that?”

“Everyone responded,” said Brandon.

“Even James and Antonio?” asked Learie.

“Yes, even the dynamic duo. But that isn’t what’s weird,” said Brandon. “Not only did everyone respond but nobody complained even though we’re supposed to have the day off. That’s the unusual part.”

“Cool. Guess I can’t take as long of an afternoon nap tomorrow as I was hoping,” Learie said.

“Nope, but I think your idea of a meeting will be a good thing. In the long run, I think it will be better than your nap.”

The players felt the bus come to a stop in the parking lot outside the gymnasium.

“Rise and shine fellas. Your chariot has arrived back at the castle,” announced Mr. Frank.

“Your what and where?” said Learie.

“That’s just Mr. Frank,” Brandon said. “I’m not really sure what he’s saying sometimes but I guess I know what he means.”

“Whatever. I’m just glad to be home. Let’s get off this bus.”

As the players cleaned up around their seats, picked up the trash, and gathered their things, Jaylen approached Coach Dunn with a limp as he navigated the bus aisle with his crutches.

“Hey, Coach. I know that today was rough,” Jaylen said. “In fact, the whole season’s been rough. But try and get some sleep tonight. I know that you’re going to want to be up before the roosters tomorrow but try and sleep in a little later than usual. You’re no good to us if you’re tired and worn down. Even though you canceled practice

because you were frustrated with us, we can turn that into a positive. Some of us can use the time to get into the training room extra or rest up. The same goes for you. Rest up a little. Use tomorrow to get a little refreshed and let's get back at it the day after."

"I appreciate that," Coach Dunn said. "I'll see what I can do."

"Also, just to keep you in the loop. We're having a team meeting tomorrow. It's supposed to be a good team meeting. I'll personally make sure that we stay focused on the positive stuff. I know that you've put a lot of trust in me over the years. I appreciate that. Trust me on this also, Coach."

"Thanks for letting me know."

Jaylen wanted to make sure that Coach wasn't worried about tomorrow's meeting so he said, "I know player-only meetings are often not very productive, but I was talking with Brandon and he assured me that this will be a positive thing and not like those meetings we hear about when a team rebels against a coach."

"Okay, thanks again, Jaylen. Have a good night."

Jaylen left the bus with Scott right behind him. Scott was another freshman on the team. He roomed with Travis. The two of them respected Jaylen a great deal. Scott and Jaylen had a class together right before lunch and often got a bite to eat together.

"Hey Jaylen, I just heard you talking with Coach about the meeting tomorrow. You also told him to get some rest and all that other stuff. That was different since you're a player and he's the Coach. I don't know if I've noticed that before. It was almost like you were coaching him."

"Not coaching. Just encouraging," Jaylen replied. "I know early on in my basketball career; I'd get mad when the coaches, teachers or even my parents wouldn't encourage me or praise me. About midway through my freshman year, I decided that instead of getting frustrated when somebody didn't acknowledge me or recognize me for something, I was going to turn that around and flip the script. I decided I would encourage or praise somebody, instead."

“You always seem like you’ve got an encouraging word for somebody when they are down. I can’t imagine you not being an encourager.”

“It’s not that I wasn’t encouraging people at all. I just wasn’t doing it enough. I also found that I wasn’t doing it when I was feeling down or frustrated, myself.”

“You said it was your freshman year when this changed. Did you have some vision or something?” Scott asked with a smirk on his face.

“No vision or alien abduction. It was Psych class,” Jaylen said. “The teacher was sharing about this guy, Karl Menninger, that had been on the cover of TIME Magazine and stuff like that. One day he was speaking to a large college class and somebody asked him what a person should do if they were depressed or distraught. The person asking the question assumed that this noted psychologist would mention some kind of counseling or cutting-edge treatment. Instead, Menninger said ‘board up the house, go across the street, find someone in need, and go help them’. When I heard that I decided to start encouraging others more. The only way for me to beat despair or frustrations was through engagement. I had to get out of my own little world. I had to stop being selfish and encourage others. If I felt like I wasn’t getting the encouragement, recognition, or praise that I wanted, then I was going to make sure that somebody else didn’t feel that way, either.”

“I never thought about it quite like that before.”

“I hadn’t either,” Jaylen said. “I also realized that it’s not just my teammates that need encouraging. But my teachers, parents, custodians, coaches, even Mr. Frank. All of those people need a kind word, smile, or breath of fresh air blown into their lives once in a while.”

“You might want to consider starting your own greeting card company,” Scott suggested. “You’ve got some great insights and deep thoughts.”

“Thanks for the encouragement, Scott. I appreciate it. You asked me about Coach to start with and I wanted you to know that I’m not trying to kiss up to him. That’s not my intention. I just try to encourage him whenever I can. And it’s not hollow encouragement. It’s not the fake stuff. It’s not like, ‘hey Coach, we all love you so keep doing what you’re doing’. That wouldn’t really benefit anyone.”

Scott chuckled and nodded his head in agreement. “I hate it when people are like ‘you can do it’ or ‘let’s go’ but they are being very generic. That doesn’t motivate me very much.”

“You’re right. We should be saying things that have substance,” Jaylen said. “We can always find something to encourage someone with. Even if one of my teammates is playing poorly, I can remind them of when they performed great. I can speak to the value they can bring to the team.”

As he heard Jaylen say that, Scott’s eyes got real big as he remembered a situation during the previous week.

“Now that you say that, I remember last week when you said ‘Scott, you can do this. You can get a stop just like in the game against Tech when you slapped the floor, got in that stance, and forced their guard to go left, totally disrupting that key play’. That motivated me because you put something real in my head. You didn’t just say ‘you can do it; you can do it’ while clapping a lot.”

Jaylen smiled at Scott’s comment, “That’s what I mean. We can always find some way to encourage others. I know that I love it when others compliment me or encourage me, so it has to work the same with others. If I can encourage others, then they might be a little more motivated. If we’re all doing that, then before you know it, maybe we have a team that’s totally looking out for each other and lifting each other up. That goes for all of us, coaches, managers, support staff, and players. We’re all in this together.”

“Never thought of that,” Scott said. “Thanks for sharing. See you tomorrow.”