

McKinley Dunn

Last Lecture

Be The Bench

While gaining my footing in middle school and highschool, I determined that in order to be important I had to be the “best”. There are many categories that being the “best” can fall into, for me, the top two were academics and athleticism. As I was sitting in the math building during seventh grade MSI, with a glint of humor in his eyes, Coach Watabe looked at me and said “usually teachers recognize the smartest kid in the class first, but in this case...” After this moment I realized that in general terms I was not the brightest crayon in the box. Though this statement never deterred me from trying hard in my classes, I concluded that I could never really be the top dog in my educational studies. With this in mind I decided to turn to athletics in hopes of better success.

In my Maeser career I have played many sports, such as soccer, cross country, basketball, swimming, lacrosse, track and field, and I even ran a few marathons. However, often my athletic efforts fell flat. I was a jack of all trades and master of none. On one occasion I felt completely crushed after not getting many minutes in a high intensity soccer game. I asked coach Simmons if we could talk about it and while I was sitting in the padded wood chairs in his office he handed me a box of tissues as sobs escaped from my body. With tears clouding my vision I expressed my frustration at my shortcomings and inability to play well after five seasons of soccer. I knew that my skill level was not good enough to attain my steep expectations. I was not and never could be the “best”.

During basketball season I watched as the time slowly ticked down on the blue gym scoreboard. Usually I got minutes but this game was different. In the last quarter, I was still

fastened in the same position on the bench. As the clock reached eight seconds Coach subbed me in. The final buzzer went off and I felt humiliated. I was Captain and I couldn't even get more than a minute in a game. Once again I was not the "best".

While playing these sports I only ever looked at the success of the player. I determined that the most important role was the person who had the best hit, scored the most goals, or ran the fastest race. I was consumed in my lack of talent and couldn't help but recognize others' surplus of skill. I failed to observe a key factor in all the sports I played. And that was the bench. At every sporting event there was a bench. This vital accommodation makes it so you don't have to sit on the itchy grass, swampy mud, or yellowing hardwood floor. It provides a sense of comfort, like a hard metal folding chair, or a molten lava soccer bench in 95 degree weather. It lifts the players up who are sitting on it and offers support; it's no flimsy lawn chair, it's sturdy and there for the long game. The player is on the bench to recover from a grueling game or a hard injury and the bench helps them rehabilitate and get back onto the field.

While competing and supporting athletic competitions on both the field and court I determined that I didn't need to be the "best", I needed to be the bench. Instead of only focusing on my own shortcomings and uncontrollable outcomes I could instead change my role to being the mundane bench to those around me. I could lift up my fellow teammates when they were in the throes of having a rough day, offer an amateur first aid kit to help a wound, or roll out their calves so they could return to playing their game. Learning from the bench I realized that my contributions to my team and those around me doesn't have to be measured by numbers on a stat sheet or seconds on a stopwatch. My position as a bench, unlike that of a point guard, striker, or defensive player allowed me to no longer focus on my personal failures, but feel a sense of pride in trying to support my team. Being the "best" does not matter as long as I am a good bench.

It seemed that my main position in the sports I played was not defensive player, post or striker. I Was the Benchwarmer.

The bench leaves the player better than it found it.

OUT CAST PARAGRAPHS

In confused disarray standing in the center of the humid green soccer field. My bulky black shin guards are cinched around my legs and my yellow jersey is on, I looked like the yield to pedestrians sign. While attempting to help my team I stand by my opposers defense waiting

for the ball. It goes through the line and I run to receive it. The dewey grass is crushed under my feet as I prepare for my moment of Glory. Then out of the blue a shrill whistle rings in my ears. The other team for some reason gets them the ball and I move on, slightly confused. Minutes later I find Myself In a similar situation and screech the whistle is blasted again. Suddenly I hear Mz. shout to my teammate “ Kelsey! Tell McKinley what offsides is!” After further direction and clarification I begin to somewhat understand how to play soccer. Throughout my middle school soccer season I was more used to the sidelines. Many days my hands occupied white and silver stringy pom poms to cheer for my team complimented by my amateurish first aid kit to treat disasters. My position on the soccer team wasn't that of a striker or defender, I was the benchwarmer.

Sitting inside I could see my friend across the gym, I was seated on a metal folding chair on the high school girls basketball team bench. The next day i decided to talk to coach norris. I confronted him to see if there was anything I could changeto do better. I looked at my skill level and determined that though i wasnt the best [layer i could contribute in other ways I could cheer for and support my team.

My moments on the bench were never dull; we always had laughs and company, but occasionally there were painful moments. Like when I had the opportunity to sit next to Allie Radmall when she was out of the game with an injured ankle and couldn't compete in the game she loved to play. You could tell that her physical pain was not the only pain she was feeling. In

this circumstance the bench was supporting Allie to get better, heal and leave so then when it was time she could play.

The benchwarmer has its perks. Seeing that you spend the most time on the bench you get to choose your seating. Generally speaking I sat near my coaches so I could hear their critiques about the game. Being the bench warmer also makes you a connoisseur of sorts, each game and athletic contest I had the opportunity to find bench characteristics I enjoyed. And I also found the necessities that each bench should have.