



The Coach's Daughter

The coach loved his daughter dearly, but she never played ball, not even T-ball. Now here she was, ready for college, and unsure what to do.

"So I guess majoring in parks and recreation is out of the question?" he asked as they idled at a red light. That was about all the career counseling he had in him.

"Dad, you know how I feel about sports."

He grunted. "How about teaching then?" He was a teacher, if you counted health.

"I see what it's like for my teachers. They're all dying for someone to show interest, but none of us ever do. I couldn't put up with that."

"Maybe something to do with computers," he said. "We got you that computer."

"I hate computers," the daughter said. "I especially hate mine."

"I don't know," the coach said. "But, it seems to me, there's got to be something you would really like that you aren't thinking of, or are crossing off the list too soon."

He noticed the oversized tokens in the dashboard coin tray. "I took your brother to the batting cages Saturday. He was hitting 'em pretty good."

The daughter rolled her eyes.

"It's a funny thing," the coach went on. "Most experts tell you that if you're a big strong hitter, you stand way back in the batting zone. That way you can extend your arms and get the most muscle on the ball. You hit it with your arms way out like that, the ball's gonna travel."

The daughter looked out the passenger window. It was going to be one of those conversations.

"But that's not such good advice if you're a poor hitter, or you're in a slump, or you're afraid of the ball," he said, mainly to himself. "That's when I tell 'em, 'Put yourself in danger a bit. Get up close to the pitch. Nothing happens if you miss the ball. But up close, anything can happen. You get a dribbler, or you beat one over the infield. Heck, you get hit, that's as good as a single."

The daughter grimaced. Was her father encouraging young kids to step in front of fastballs? "Is there a point to this?" she asked.

"A point, right. Well, OK, so your brother is swinging away. The first few times we went to the cages he's missing everything. But I move him in close, and he starts to make contact -- foul tips, ground balls and stuff.

"Then he does something interesting. He starts getting mad at the pitching machine. Or pitchers generally. Or something. Because he steps back in the box, and extends his arms. Now he's really getting around, and the ball is rocketing off his bat -- bam, bam, bam. And all the time, he's saying stuff like, 'Didn't think I could hit that one, did you?' and 'Just give me what you

got.' The ball is flying out of there.

"It was kind of cuckoo," the coach said, "but it worked out okay."

The daughter sighed. "So what you're saying is, I have to put myself in harm's way and commit myself to success for good things to happen?"

The coach shrugged. "It's just a story."

"Right, pops. OK, here's my stop, I gotta go."

"You have a good day in there, little girl" the coach said, giving her the thumb-up sign.

She patted his forearm. "I love you Daddy," she called over her shoulder. And ran up the stairs to school.

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